

## Ark Volume 23

### Act 1: Hell Door's Defensive War

'Huk huk huk.....dammit!'

Ark bit his lip and sighed. After entering the secret dungeon using the quantum machine, Ark had developed a plan to handle the present circumstances. He used Wormer who renovated the 59th floor to delay Alan and the demons while the Nagaran allied forces recaptured Silvana. Of course, holding out against the 10,000 demons and Avenger guild for a few days wasn't easy with such a small number of troops. However, the special attack unit used the complicated terrain of the 59th floor and the traps to conduct guerrilla warfare. Ark thought utilizing those methods would be enough.

'Meanwhile Nagaran's allied forces will conquer Silvana and enter the secret dungeon. Presently all the monsters in the secret dungeon are gone thanks to Alan and the demons. Furthermore, there is no reason for JusticeMan ajusshi to get lost when he has grasped the terrain perfectly. They could advance all the way to the 60th floor in one day. I just have to somehow hold the 60th floor until then.'

If the combined forces reached the 60th floor then the situation would end. That was Ark's plan and it was proceeding as planned. However, an unexpected problem had occurred. Right.....

"How about it? Don't I look different from before?"

A proud voice was heard from nearby. It was Curio leaning against a nearby stone wall with an arrogant posture. He was showing off his form to Radun and Purital.

"Huhuhu, of course I look different. It is natural that I'm different. You guys might not know but I am different from yesterday. I am high pureness vampire. Do you know what that means?"

Ttadadadak, clack clack?

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak?

"I'm not an ordinary summon like you anymore."

Curio spat into his hand and ran it through his bangs.

"Heh, well I have a right to act like this. Like I said just now, my social status and face has improved so you should respect me a bit more. Because I am a high pureness vampire. Yes, a high pureness vampire. Doesn't that word feel good? I brought it up in conversation but....."

"Don't go overboard, eh?"

"What do you mean? Are my words wrong?"

Curio pouted with discontent at Ark's sharp words. After looking at Curio, his irritation rose from 100% to 120%.

'Damn, my plan was useless. Because of this guy.....'

That's right. The problem that occurred in Ark's plan was this bat. Ark had cancelled all his plans for Alan after Curio became absorbed by Infector. In order to rescue Curio, he had split up the rehabilitation troops. This led him to lose 200 members and for Alan to reach the 60th floor quicker than expected. All his plans had perished because of one bat. Despite that, Curio couldn't grasp the atmosphere and continued bragging.

'His nature is still the same!'

That feeling wouldn't go away even if the bat was boiled in a soup. But unfortunately he had no time for that now.

"Ark-nim, those guys are coming again!"

A voice coming from the watchtower was heard. Ark who was watching Curio flinched and turned his head. Between the dark red rocks that formed a valley, thousands of pairs of red eyes were approaching over the swamp. The smell of beasts came from the valley. It was them! The

thousands of demons that Alan commanded! 600 Avengers and 8,000 demons had entered the 60th floor. That was 1,000~2,000 more monsters than Ark had expected. On the other hand, Ark only had 2,000 troops to defend with. He was losing in the numbers game.

‘But.....’

“Every unit go to their positions!”

The soldiers quickly dispersed at Ark’s command.

*-Kuaaaah!*

By the time the soldiers got to their positions, the demons were already a short distance away.

“Damn, there’s no time to rest. Curio, Purital, move to the strategy area!”

“Sheesh, making me do this.....”

Curio complained and flew into the air. Meanwhile, the Tallons came running first. The Tallons raised their spears and axes as they ran across the muddy ground and into the stone wall. In the middle of the valley, rocks were stacked to form a wall that looked like a dam. It had a height of 10 metres. The Tallons climbed up and reached the middle of the wall. Ark’s eyes flash and he yelled.

“Defense system operation, change the fortress to B type!”

Chelkong, chelkong, chelkong, chelkong!

There was a mechanical sound and the wall was covered with sharp thorns. Hundreds of spears had emerged between the rocks making up the wall. The spears pierced through the bodies of the Tallons climbing the wall. The hundreds of alive Tallons struggled and shrieked while they were like insects stuck on a stick.

*-Kurak, nomarad panaram!*

After the first assault unit was skewered, the high ranking demons yelled. And several thousand demons once again gathered to attack the wall. Ark just sneered and shouted.

“Bah, not a chance. Launch!”

Kiririririk.....tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

It was the sound effect of something being fired! At the same time, hundreds of spears exploded from the wall.

The demons screamed and tried to run away as the spears descended. However, the valley was naturally narrow in front of the wall. There was no space to hide. The demons sunk into the swamp as the spears plunged into their bodies.

“This is the castle that I erected. There is no place for them to hide. Continue your attacks!”

“I understand. Engineers keep on loading the catapults!”

The voice of the unit commanders was audible throughout the place. The raccoons scurried all around the walls and loaded several equipment. They were equipping the spears that they Meow and Wolrang standing next to them were holding. The machine automatically worked and new spears flew outside the wall. It was similar to a work simulation being repeated many times.

“Launch!”

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

Hundreds of spears once again flew. Ark marvelled once again over the power of the spear as he watched from the fort's wall.

‘It's terrible.’

The strength of the spears being shot from the machine was absurd. It flew 100 metres and pierced through 2~3 demons at once. Of course, the

demons wouldn't die from one hit no matter how powerful the spears were. But they lost at least 10~20% health.

'Even so, I can exterminate the demons after the attack repeats a few times!'

That's what Ark was thinking.

*-Kurak, kurak, banum!*

100 large demons lumbered ponderously towards the front. Wearing thick armour and shield, it was the Heavy Walkers.

With their heavy defense, even the spears which boasted overwhelming power would bounce off the Heavy Walkers! If those guys defended in the front then the demons wouldn't be hit by the spears anymore. Ark clicked his tongue in irritation as the spear attack was blocked.

"Sheesh, those guys..... But the spear attack is just the beginning. Now, it is time to clean the water. Open the floodgates!"

Ark tapped his finger and shouted. One part of the wall opened and huge amounts of water was poured out. Since the 60th floor of the Abyss consisted primarily of deep swamps. But if the water was drained away then it would just be a muddy ground. That was why Ark built the fort in the middle of the valley like a dam and the water was collected. Of course, he didn't make that function just for fun.

Ku kwa kwa kwa kwa, ku kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The water poured out of the floodgates in a rough, rapid stream. And it swallowed up the valley like an angry beast. The demons were naturally swept away by such a rapid torrent of water. But Ark wasn't satisfied with just that.

"Chain attack, water grinder movement!"

"Wah ah ah ah!"

The coalition members shouted and poured something from the wall. They were stones as sharp as a knife blade. The tons of gravel that poured down were sucked in by the rapid stream. The rapid stream which emerged from the floodgates had overwhelming power but it was ultimately just water. It wouldn't deal the demons direct damage. But it was different if sharp stones were mixed in with the water. The water swirled violently while holding the sharp stones!

Ka ka ka ka, ka ka ka ka, ka ka ka ka!

The demons cried out as the rapid stream hit them. The fiercely spinning water and sharp stones ripped through the flesh of the demons.

"It really is effective."

That's right. Ark was trying to get this effect when he blocked up the water. The torrent alone wouldn't cause much damage to the demons. However, that situation changed with the presence of the sharp stones. Adding the stones to the water had the effect of a grinder. And the actual effect was more than expected. The demons caught by the torrent of water became tattered rags in an instant. The torrent was dyed red because of the demons' blood. In particular, it dealt catastrophic damage to the Heavy Walkers.

"It was a good thing that I stocked up on those stones."

Ark laughed as he saw the water dyed red from the blood. Other demons were pushed by the water to some degree and were hit by the stones. However, the Heavy Walkers were wearing heavy armour which weighted a lot! Therefore they weren't lightly pushed by the approaching water. They had no choice but to be hit harder by the stones. Armour and shields were no help against such attacks. The armour and shields which became tattered fell off the Heavy Walkers, leaving them naked and at the mercy of the sharp stones. That's why Ark named it water grinder! It was literally a grinder made with water. Thanks to the rapid stream, the demons gathered in front of the fort were swept away. However, he couldn't afford to sigh with relief.

*-Kuram, kuram, baradram!*

A voice resonated through the valley and the demons once again gathered at the swamp. Along with the Tallons and Heavy Walkers, there were also gargoyles flying around. It was a nightmare like situation where they were attacked by land and air. A moan flowed from the mouth of the coalition members who thought they had finally interrupted the attacks.

“Oh my god.....!”

“They won’t stop coming!”

Then Ark shouted towards the coalition members.

“Everybody steady your spirit! It’s not anything new. We knew from the start that we had the disadvantage in numbers. That’s why we didn’t sleep for a few days to make the fort. Now it is time to test the performance of the fortress that you spent many days struggling to make. First, use the anti-aircraft engine!”

“Yes. The gargoyle will attack from the sky. G engine operation!”

Ku ku ku ku, kwa kwa kwa kwa, kkikikiki, tung tung tung tung!

A mechanical sound rang out and various devices started operating. The coalition members ran around and cut dozens of ropes, causing a pole around 10 metres high to spring up. A steel lattice was stuck to the end of it like an enormous fly swatter. And it hit the gargoyles flying in the sky like swatting flies in a swamp.

“Okay. From now on we will deploy the engines of the fortress. Each leader will operate the engines depending on the situation! Don’t forget. If you allow those guys to enter the fort then all your efforts will be wasted! We are the last defense line to protect Nagaran!”

“Ohhhhhh!”

The coalition members shouted and ran around the walls after shooting down the gargoyles. There were various mechanical sounds as the engines within the fort began to operate. Lava flowed down the wall that the demons were clinging to while rocks flew over the wall and crushed the demons. That's right. The reason Ark was able to stop the 8,000 demons with only 2,000 troops was because of this fortress. While Ark and the attack unit were delaying Alan on the 59th floor, Wormer had used the Meow, raccoons, Wolrang and the Eastern Nation to build the fortress. It was a fortress created by the genius inventor Wormer and the gifted raccoons! When those engines were used, even the thousands of demons were helpless. The number of dead demon bodies just accumulated in front of the fortress as time passed. Despite their numbers, the coalition members were clearly superior when looking at the military situation. However.....

'Why?'

Ark looked at the surging demons with an uneasy look. There was one part he couldn't accept. Now he would clarify the situation.

The demons had to pass through the fortress to reach the Hell Door that led to the Hell River. If their plan was successful then Silvana along with Nagaran would be flooded with the Hell River. He confirmed in Shangri-La that the demons would gain a significant advantage if the Hell River flooded. In fact, this part was very subtle. The records in Shangri-La didn't tell him the advantages the demons would get in detail.

'But there is no doubt that it would have a devastating impact on the Demonic War.'

Ark was convinced of that. At first, Ark had simply regarded this event as Alan's revenge. But he changed his mind after talking with the rehabilitation members before gathering the allied forces. It was clear that this event was aimed towards Global Exos by Alan and some villains. It wasn't different from an attack on a big business. And depending on the results, Alan could either be a criminal or a tycoon. Alan wasn't just moving with the intention of getting revenge on Ark.



‘The Red Man is clearly acting behind Alan.’

That’s right. The Red Man! When looking at the context so far, there was no doubt that he was the one pulling the strings. He was a user causing problems to a big business on an international scale. Ark couldn’t fathom how he came up with the idea. But considering the astronomical amount of money Global Exos poured into the online game.....The person must have huge funds and exceptional organizational skills. Depending on the outcome of this event, hundreds of billions of won could be moved by an international criminal organization. If Alan was connected with such an organization then he could move selfishly.

‘This means the incident with Silvana is the result of a long plan!’

Ark reached that conclusion. The demons in the Sinus Principality were currently on the defensive thanks to the Bristania and Schudenberg expeditions. Yet they had removed 100,000 troops from such a situation. This meant that the flooding of the Hell River was strategically more important than the Sinus Principality.

‘Despite the fortress’ incredible defense, the demons are just attacking like crazy and receiving huge damage. But.....’

The genius inventor Wormer and the raccoons had created all types of devices to block the Hell Door on the 60th floor. Despite the demons having 4 times more troops than the coalition forces, it wasn’t enough when taking into consideration the fortress. And the 8,000 demons have been blocked for 24 hours. In the meantime, at least 1,500 demons had died. Meanwhile the coalition only lost 200 people.

‘Why are they blindly attacking despite knowing that they can’t capture the fortress? Why are they attacking so excessively?’

This was the part Ark wasn’t convinced about. Of course, they were demons. They were still monsters. How could monsters come up with a clear strategy? However, currently Alan was commanding the demons. So he couldn’t understand why they were blindly attacking the

fortress. There had to be a reason Alan was rushing. It all started a few hours with JusticeMan's emergency communication.

*-Ark, what is your situation now?*

*-I've somehow blocked Alan on the 60th floor.*

*-Is that so?" Everything has been put in order here.*

*-Huh? Everything has been cleaned up?*

*-Yes, we've destroyed the black obelisks and regained Silvana.*

It was felt like it suddenly rained in the middle of a drought. If the allied forces recaptured Silvana then they could enter the secret dungeon! If the allied forces entered the secret dungeon and exterminated the demons then everything would end.

Of course, there was still a mountain to cross before that happened. Ark had to stop the Alan until the allied forces reached the 60th floor.

*-Alan has already disposed of the monsters so you should have no obstacles in the dungeon. JusticeMan ajusshi has also fully grasped the terrain of the dungeon which will reduce a lot of time. When taking that into consideration, it would only take a day or two. With the fortress that Wormer and Dark Eden created, we will somehow be able to endure for that time.*

Ark was optimistic about the situation. Then JusticeMan said with a concerned voice.

*-..... By the way, there is a bit of a problem.*

*-A problem?*

*-It has been weighing on my mind.....as you know, we've recaptured Silvana. We checked that there were 40,000 demons before our last attack. But when fighting the demons, I noticed the number was reduced by 10,000. Thanks to that, we recaptured Silvana faster than expected.*

*-There were fewer demons?*

Ark's face was filled with confusion for a moment. Then he instantly understood the situation. And JusticeMan's next words convinced him even more.

*-We've already entered the dungeon and discovered traces of movement that is a few hours old.*

Ark felt his heart drop at the words. This was the worst case scenario for Ark. The demons on the defensive by the allied forces' attack judged that it would be difficult to protect Silvana. Therefore they abandoned the castle early to send reinforcements to Alan. While the allied forces had captured Silvana immediately, the demons were already ahead by a few hours. If the monsters were still in the secret dungeon then those few hours wouldn't be a problem. However, all the mobs in the secret dungeon had been cleared by Alan. With the obstacles gone, it would be difficult for the allied forces to catch up with the demons. And if the demons arrived at the 60th floor before the allied forces.....

'10,000 demons would be added to Alan's 6,500 troops!'

While the allied forces would arrive a few hours later, Ark's group currently only had 1,800 people. There was no guarantee that could hold the fortress against 16,500 demons for even a few hours.

*-It is still too early to be disappointed. Despite Alan learning how to navigate the dungeon, the demons descending haven't experienced that yet. Even if the demons are a few hours ahead, if the fast-moving task force is organized then they can reach the 60th floor before the demons. Then the combined forces can delay Alan until the allied forces catch up.*

*-But.....*

Ark started to talk before sighing and shaking his head. Like JusticeMan said, if they organized a task force then they could catch up with the demons. Even if there were no monsters, the secret dungeon was a complicated place like a maze. Even if Alan sent them a guide, this wasn't an easy place to memorize. The demons that entered would have no choice but to wander around a lot. On the other hand, Ark and the

allied forces had completely memorized the construction of the secret dungeon. They could take the shortest course while the demons were wandering and overtake them to arrive at the 60th floor first. However, overtaking the demons was different from stopping them.

‘The secret dungeon has complicated passages that didn’t move. Yet there is only one way to go to the next floor. If those demons aren’t stopped then won’t they keep on steadily advancing?’

In the end, the task force wouldn’t be able to tie up the ankles of the demons. Eventually the thousands of demons would join Alan. Ark didn’t mention this because JusticeMan also already knew it. None of the dirty tricks or schemes he tried to think about would work.

“Damn, do we just have to sit here and watch as it happens?”

Shambala muttered in an annoyed voice after he was told the contents of the communication. Ark thought about something and shook his head.

“No, the situation is not that bad.”

“What?”

“I told you. The task force can catch up with the demon reinforcements.”

“But isn’t there any way for the task-force to stop the demons?”

“That’s right. It means that every time the task force catches up, there will reduce the number of reinforcements. When considering the level of the monsters, the task force should consist of 2,000 troops. In other words, if the task force catches up 2~3 times then they can reduce the number of reinforcements by 4,000~6,000.”

“But if they join forces with Alan then we will still be dealing with 10,000~12,000 demons. We don’t even have 2,000 troops at the moment.”

“That is why we had Wormer and the raccoons build the fortress.”

“But this sloppy fortress can’t even stop 6,500 demons.”

“H-huh? You bastard, what did you say? It is thanks to the fortress that you’re still alive.....”

Wormer who was the architect of the fortress jumped up and exclaimed after hearing Shambala’s words. Then Ark raised his hand, restrained Wormer and said.

“The fortress is still in an unfinished state.”

Ark said in response to Shambala. That’s right. In fact, the fort built on the 60th floor was still unfinished. Wormer designed the fort to be constructed in three days. So Ark and the attack unit were supposed to gain 3 days on the 59th floor. However, Curio’s crisis had unexpectedly destroyed that plan and Alan broke through the 59th floor in only 40 hours.

“Hoh, you already know it. That’s right. The original fortress was designed to block Alan and the 10,000 demons. But you guys didn’t buy the right amount of time on the 59th floor so it is only 50% completed. If the fortress is 100% completed then the demons won’t be a problem no matter their number!”

Wormer snorted and said. Even if it was 100% completed, how much of a difference would it make? However, Wormer had designed the fortress to withstand 10,000 demons. If they had the 3~4 days to complete it then it could last against the 10,000 demons. In other words, if the fortress was completed then enduring against 12,000 monsters for a few hours wouldn’t be a problem. Shambala also realized this and asked.

“Then.....?”

“Yes, it would take the demon reinforcements at least a day to reach Alan. If we finish Wormer’s design then we can hold out until the allied forces arrive.”

“But we only have 2,000 people. To prevent the attacks and build the fortress.....”

Shambala muttered sceptically until he trailed off as he realized something. Then he gave a look like he was confirming it.

“.....That’s right. Isn’t Alan oblivious to the fact that the fortress is unfinished?”

“Exactly.”

Ark grinned and nodded.

“Alan knows that this fort won’t be easily captured with 6,500 monsters. So he sacrificed Silvana to bring reinforcements. And he only has to wait a day for thousands of reinforcements to arrive. In such a situation, there is no reason to waste troops by attacking the fortress. Alan will definitely rest until the reinforcements arrive. In other words, we have at least a day.”

This was the only solution Ark came up with. No, it was an analysis of the situation rather than an idea he conceived.

“In the meantime, if all forces work on it then we can increase the fort’s completion rate to 80%. It should be enough to endure the attack from the reinforcements for 2~3 hours until the allied forces arrive. If it is 80% completed then the fortress can last against 10,000 monsters. No, we have to use every possible method to make it endure!”

“Of course!”

Wormer exclaimed while touching his chest. So Ark’s troops started the fortress construction without any breaks. But the situation didn’t go as he imagined. In the beginning, Alan had stopped attacking like Ark expected after receiving the notification that the reinforcements were coming. After 5 hours had passed, the demons unexpectedly stirred and started making their way to the fort again. It had been 1 hour since then. Despite the demons receiving enormous damage, they just relentlessly continued to attack. He couldn’t understand Alan’s behaviour.....

Ark bit his lip as he recalled the memories.

“There’s only one thing I can think of.”

Alan had used the gargoyles to spy on Ark and noticed that they were constructing the fort. And he immediately knew Ark’s strategy.

“Dammit!”

He cursed at the unpleasant thought. Now Ark only had one choice left. The fortress couldn’t be constructed anymore so they had to reduce the number of demons as much as possible before the reinforcements arrived. That was the way to survive. But that also wasn’t an easy task.

‘The loaded equipment can’t be used forever.’

That’s right. The devices on the fortress could be used repeatedly but they couldn’t be used randomly. For example, the engine that discharged the water couldn’t be used again until enough water had built up. It was the same for the lava flow along the walls. If the demons continued attacking around the clock then some devices would become unnecessary. A long battle without any breaks was also a problem for the exhausted soldiers who hadn’t rested for several days.

‘If we continued fighting like this then we’ll be too exhausted when the reinforcements show up.’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

“Ark-nim, Cyclops are approaching from the demon camp!”

“Cyclops!”

Ark flinched and paid attention. Huge monsters were walking through the valley. They were one eyed giants with huge, muscular bodies, the Cyclops. Those guys approached while carrying huge objects in their hands. Then they swung their arms and the huge objects began to fly towards the fortress. Ark looked panicked.

“T-this.....block it! All magicians focus their magic on shields!”

Wormer's fortress was armed with various devices. However, this fortress also had a fatal weakness. It was vulnerable to long distance attacks from ranged weapons. This was the reason why installing traps on the walls weren't used in regular sieges. No matter how many traps were on the walls, it would become obsolete if destroyed by a siege weapon.

"My will shall be a strong shield.....Bounce Shield!"

The magicians simultaneously cast shield spells. But among the 2,000 troops, 1,500 of them were NPCs such as the Meow, Wolrang, raccoons and Eastern Nation. Among the 500 users, only 40 of them were magicians. It would take more than 40 magicians to shield an entire wall. Furthermore, the Cyclops had thrown dozens of massive objects.

Kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

With a roar, the rocks tore through the shields of the magicians. There was no way the fly swatter could block dozens of rocks. Once again, the Cyclops was a huge 20 metres monster with enormous strength. But they weren't a tricky opponent. Despite their destructive power, their movements and reaction rate was low so it was easy to deal with them. However, that was in a conventional battle. In a situation like this, the Cyclops could use its incredible speed to throw huge rocks across hundreds of metres. They were the worst opponent in a siege.

"Ark-nim, we've suffered serious damage on the left wall!"

"The attack just now destroyed 10 spear launchers!"

Not surprisingly, the situation became confused from that one attack.

"Dammit! Engineers, hurry and repair the damage!"

Dozens of engineers rushed towards the damaged walls.

"The necessary materials....huck! What, what the? T-this....."



One of the engineers surveying a crushed device stepped back with a pale face. The engineer saw that the huge object thrown was moving. The object moved and twitched. And something protruded from the object.....

-Grrrrrrrr!

"Huck, it isn't a rock. T-this is....."

"It is Kurak! These guys are Kurak! Run....kuaaaack!"

The engineer screamed before his body was cut and a fountain of blood spurted out. The one devouring the engineer's upper body that was cut was a huge maggot called Kurak. That's right. The huge objects that the Cyclops' threw were the maggots Kurak. The Kurak moved had been thrown past the walls and attacked the engineers.

"This is.....damn, the aims of these fellows are the devices!"

Ark shouted in an urgent voice.

"If the devices are destroyed then the fortress will instantly collapse. The Meow will protect the raccoons and lure the Kurak to the rear defenders. The Wolrang and attack unit will exterminate the lured Kurak. Hurry!"

"Nyaaaaa. This way you maggots!"

Hundreds of Meow clawed the Kurak and provoked them.

"Now's the time. Attack!"

After the Meow lured the Kurak to the right position, the Wolrang and special attack unit lying in wait jumped out.

Despite being only level 300, the Kurak's shell was hard as steel so its defense was enormous. However, they had received quite a bit of damage after being thrown 100 metres by the Cyclops. When the Meow, Wolrang and special attack unit poured their attacks then the monsters deflated like a balloon. But 10 more Kurak flew as the first ones were wiped out. One small part of the wall collapsed as the Kurak flew

in. The thrown Kurak dealt damage to the fortress and attacked the engineers and the devices. The dual attack of the Cyclops and Kurak caused chaos.

“Concentrate all iron arrows on the Cyclops!”

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

Hundreds of iron arrows were shot from the walls. However, the iron flew over 100 metres and lost the power to penetrate the Cyclops’ thick skin and muscles.

Most of the iron arrows barely pierced the skin. Meanwhile, the Cyclops had thrown another 10 Kurak into the fortress.

The leader who was dealing with the Kurak shouted breathlessly.

“We can’t deal with the Kurak if they keep on coming in!”

“I know!”

Ark shouted angrily. Suddenly he heard Curio’s voice in his ear.

“Master, I’ve arrived!”

“Okay, Curio. Get started. This is a chance!”

“Sheesh, saying the same thing.....”

Curio grunted and muttered. Then one of the Cyclops suddenly winced. And it hit its own body like hitting a mosquito.....

Ark’s mana was sucked out and a message window appeared in front of him.

-Curio has successfully used Blood-sucking on the Cyclops.

\* The secondary effect of skill absorption has failed!

\* The secondary effect of skill absorption has failed!

\* The secondary effect of Blood-sucking, ‘Confusion’ has been

successful!

<Curio can control the 'Confused' Cyclops for 30 minutes>

"It's a success!"

Ark laughed and muttered. That's right. This was Ark's trump card against the Cyclops. Confusion was the secondary effect of Blood-sucking that Curio acquired after evolving! The Cyclops was the epitome of 'strong but stupid.' Their power was so strong that they could throw large rocks hundreds of metres but they were so stupid they couldn't learn skills. And Curio's Confusion had a higher chance of working the more stupid the opponent was. It was unnecessary to say but weren't they easier to incite because they were stupid? So Ark attacked the Cyclops and made them move near the entrance of the valley where Curio was waiting. While they were focused on the fort, Curio used Blood-sucking several times until the Confusion effect was applied.

"Hehehe, these oversized but stupid monsters. Become the body of the high pureness vampire. Now! One eyed monster, let's get started!"

Curio hit the head of the confused Cyclops with his wing and shouted.

*-Roaaaaaar!*

The Cyclops shrieked and attacked another Cyclops. The Kurak it was about to throw fell and was stepped on. The Cyclops belatedly realized the situation and swung its fist. But Curio quickly flew around the Cyclops and sucked its blood like crazy. In fact, Blood-sucking wasn't easy to use against general monsters. So the probability of Confusion being triggered wasn't high. However, it was different when dealing with a 20 metres large Cyclops. There were a lot of places to bite and the danger was low thanks to its slow reactions. Moreover, their intelligence was probably in the single digits so it easy to trigger Confusion. On the other hand, if successful then they could get a large demon to work for them.

"There is no way you can hit this body!"

Suck, suck, suck, suck!

After a few times, another Cyclops fell victim to Confusion. Curio whose stomach became swollen from the blood laughed and raised his voice.

"Kekekeke. Now, these Cyclops. Feel free to run wild!"

The demons in the area fell into a state of chaos. The Cyclops under Curio's control started rolling on the ground while fighting other Cyclops. The Cyclops randomly crashed into the valley while fighting and caused a hail of rocks to fall. The demons near the Cyclops were crushed by the huge bodies and falling rocks. The entrance of the valley was filled with screams and blood.

*-Kuram, kuram, baradram!*

In the end, it became a situation where the demons killed their fellow colleagues.

"Kekekeke. Good, good. I'll have you guys fight and die among yourselves.....eh?"

Curio who was flapping his wings and watching from the ceiling flinched. His eyes narrowed and he frowned until he raised his voice.

"Master, it is Alan!"

"What? Alan?"

Ark who was dealing with the Kurak along with the Meow and Wolrang suddenly raised his head.

"Where?"

"Near the place where the Cyclops are running wild!"

Ark leapt onto a wall and used Eyes of the Cat to look at the area Curio indicated. But even if he used Eyes of the Cat, it wasn't easy to spot Alan

from hundreds of metres away through thousands of monsters. Ark gave up checking himself and asked Curio.

“Curio, check it again. Are you certain it is Alan?”

“Do you think I wouldn’t recognize him? I’m certain! It is Alan!”

“Is there anyone else around him?”

“Including the Dark Elf and magician we saw before, there is approximately 100 people.”

‘The Dark Elf and magician is Timosi and Jewel, so the person they’re accompanying is without a doubt Alan!’

Ark’s forehead wrinkled at Curio’s answer.

‘Why did that guy appear?’

It had already been a day and a half since Alan and his troops entered the 60th floor. Yet Alan had never directly appeared on the battlefield. Currently the fortress was blocking the exit of the valley so there problems stopping Alan from conducting the problem. Wormer and the raccoons had also installed various traps scattered around the fortress so there was no reason for him to take a risk.

‘However, this is the first time that Alan appeared on the battlefield.’

The all-out assault of the demons wasn’t a burden on Alan. Just a little more and he had a chance for success. But he never expected that the Cyclops would become confused and started attacking each other.

‘He must be trying something different. Anyway…….’

A cold smile spread on Ark’s face as he organized his thoughts.

‘…….This is a chance!’

Ark knew that the current military situation wasn’t that good. His troops had tirelessly sneaked through the secret dungeon to install traps

and they also constructed the fortress. They could barely concentrate on the battle and swing their swords because of their fatigue. But was that all? The demons continuous push meant that quite a few devices were damaged.

‘It might not even hold until the allied forces and demon reinforcements appeared.’

But there was a way to quickly reverse the military situation. It was Alan’s death! That’s right. The person commanding the thousands of demons was Alan. If Ark dealt with Alan then the person commanding the demons would disappear.

‘Of course, dealing with the demons still won’t be easy.’

He had confidence that he could win against Alan. After his encounter with Alan in Pabiun Canyon, he had gained all of his Animal King set as well as the legendary sword, ‘Shining Darkness.’ Alan wasn’t an opponent easily dealt with but Ark had confidence he could win. The problem was that Ark would have to reach the place where Alan was. Even if he managed to deal with Alan, there was a chance he would be killed by the demons. However, Ark and Alan’s importance was different.

If Ark died, there were still a number of users that could be left in charge including Wormer and Boramae. They had the ability to command the units if Ark died. However, the demons were different. Alan was a unique commander within the demon army. In other words, Alan’s death meant the demons would just degenerate into a group of monsters. No matter how tired the troops were, they could deal with the disorganized demons.

‘I have a lot more to gain from this gamble. So there is no reason to hesitate!’

“Shambala, gather 400 people from the coalition and have them gather in the back.

Ark shouted after quickly grasping the situation. Shambala sensed that the atmosphere wasn't ordinary and quickly organized a detachment of soldiers. Ark left the defense of the Hell Door to the coalition members. Ark registered the people as a separate attack group and shouted.

"Demonic Distortion!"

Ark's bag opened and black equipment flew into the sky. It formed a large pentagram and exploded before a message window appeared.

-You have used Demonic Distortion.

The released demonic energy from the equipment will distort the space, changing the location of allies and enemies.

Please designate an enemy target when changing locations.

"Curio!"

"300 metres to your 3 o'clock!"

"The demons 300 metres away at my 3 o'clock!"

Ark shouted after hearing Curio's words. At the same time there, the space warped around Ark's group. Then Ark was sucked into thin air and flew away to the specified place. Alan, Timosi and the Avengers immediately appeared in front of him. That's right. Ark used Demonic Distortion to appear in front of Alan. The valid range for Demonic Distortion was 500 metres. Alan had appeared within 500 metres of the fort so it was a perfect opportunity for Ark.

"Now! Don't worry about the surrounding demons. Concentrate all your offensive power on Alan!"

Shambala and the detachment instantly ran towards Alan. The Avengers belatedly realized their appearance and hurriedly gathered around Alan. However, Alan's convoy only had 100 people. There were thousands of demons around but they weren't trained so they wouldn't respond promptly to sudden situations like this. Besides, the demons

were still in chaos because of the confused Cyclops. Meanwhile, the 400 elite detachment penetrated through the Avenger's defense line.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There were clashing sounds and dozens of Avengers collapsed. Alan became flustered and tried to retreat as his guards collapsed. Ark was convinced of his victory by those reactions.

"It is already too late! Shambala, go!"

"Ark and Shambala narrowed the distance before attacking Alan from both sides. The black light and red light intersected and went through Alan's body. Alan's health quickly fell to 50%.

'What the? This guy.....why is he so weak?'

Ark was baffled as he used Eyes of the Cat to check Alan's health. Even in a 1 on 1 fight, he wasn't able to guarantee the chances of success against Alan. Even if it was a surprise, one attack had really decreased his health by 50%? No, what on earth was that crude movement just then? Furthermore, he is running away after one hit? Alan wasn't the only one. Shambala had tried to attack Timosi but she was also running away.

"What is this? Do you think I will miss?"

Shambala shouted angrily and moved like the wind. Ark noticed and also chased after Alan with Sprint. The demons belatedly realized the situation and stepped in front of Ark and Shambala. But they moved systematically and the detachment stopped the demons, making it possible for Ark and Shambala to catch up with Alan.

"Kkiiiiik! Kkiiiiik!"

When Ark ran in front of him, Alan let out a bizarre moan. Shambala muttered with a disgusted expression.

"What the? This guy, has he suddenly turned into a monkey?"



“Kkikik!”

Then Alan turned and ran towards Shambala.

“What’s this? Just try it! Torrential Sword!”

Shambala laughed as he blocked Alan’s clumsy attack and brandished his dagger. At the same time, dozens of daggers pierced Alan’s body. Alan instantly fell to the ground. He got to his feet and tried to run away again. No, it was when he tried to get up.

‘Why is he like this.....?’

“Who would’ve expected this situation?”

Ark laughed as he pressed his sword to Alan’s neck. And Ark’s sword went vertically through Alan’s neck.

“Kuaaaah!”

Alan screamed with distress as his health reached the bottom. The commander of the enemy had been defeated in the middle of enemy territory!

“What the hell? That Alan.....maybe he stayed up a few days and fell asleep in the unit?”

Shambala murmured after dealing with Alan so easily. But Ark had no interest in Alan’s circumstances. The important thing was that Alan was killed. Now that the demons lost their commander, their organizational ability would quickly collapse!

“Okay. Now we just have to return to the fortress.”

Ark muttered while looking down at Alan’s corpse before his face suddenly stiffened. A mysterious phenomenon was happening to Alan’s body. Alan’s body that was lying on the ground warped and turned into pieces of dough. The face also cleared and became as smooth as an egg. What was going on? Ark used Skill Penetration and the unexpected message window appeared.

### -Doppelganger's special skill: Steal a Face

A doppelganger is a mysterious demon who existed since ancient times.

The doppelganger is a relatively weak demon but it has the uncanny ability to steal faces. Although the technique is called 'Steal a Face,' it actually copies everything about the target. When Steal a Face is used, the doppelganger perfectly replicates the target's information and even their habits. The doppelganger uses this skill to lure friends of family members so that the demons can devour them. In ancient times, the doppelganger even committed terrible crimes and caused a witch hunt to spread.

Even though the appearance is copied, it isn't possible to gain the abilities of the target.

## **Act 2: Flood, Hell River (I)**

Doppelganger?'

Ark asked as he checked the information window. Even after seeing it with his eyes, he couldn't understand what had happened. All the information Ark knew about the doppelgangers passed through his head. In fact, the biggest reason the kingdom had for initiating martial law and closing the checkpoints was because of the doppelgangers. There was an outbreak of doppelgangers stealing the faces of travelling merchants and hiding in villages to eat the residents. But most of those incidents disappeared after martial law was initiated and the checkpoints closed. Ark had never seen an actual doppelganger so far.....

'Then Alan also brought some doppelgangers into the secret dungeon?'

Ark hurriedly looked around. Ark saw that of the dead Avenger members also had their bodies turn to dough.

.....They weren't simply mixed in. Alan and all of the Avengers were doppelgangers.

'The doppelgangers wouldn't have selfishly copied Alan's appearance. Then the doppelgangers' transformations must be due to Alan's order. If that's the case?'

This situation was a trap made by Alan? Ark thought of something and the hairs on his body suddenly raised. Alan had the doppelganger transform into him to lure Ark here!

"The detachment should build a defense around Shambala and I!"

Ark yelled before looking at Curio.

"Curio, use satellite surveillance mode and look for Alan's position!"

"Eh? Eh? U-understood!"

Curio flew down from the ceiling and used satellite surveillance mode. There was only one reason Ark could think of for Alan to use the doppelganger to lure Ark to the battlefield. It was to hide behind the doppelganger for a surprise attack on Ark. So Ark immediately switched to a defense formation to prepare for Alan's attack. However, the demons were the only ones to attack Ark's group.

"I can't see him. There is no signs of Alan on the battlefield."

"Nothing? That's impossible....."

Ark became even more baffled after hearing Curio's report. Why did Alan lure Ark to the battlefield if not to attack him? If it wasn't to lure him then why did the doppelgangers transform into him and exposed themselves? No, this was a good chance so where on earth was Alan?

'Something.....it must be something obvious. What's going on?'

-Kuaaaa!

Ark worried about it while attacking the monsters coming from all directions. Although the confused Cyclops were still running wild, sooner or later they would end up being surrounded by thousands of demons.

"Jeez, what are you doing? This is the middle of enemy territory! Don't just stand there!"

Shambala shouted as he fought the encroaching demons. However Ark couldn't easily decide his next move. Ark couldn't grasp Alan's scheme for removing him from the fortress so he couldn't easily move.

'It is imperative that I determine Alan's location!'

"Curio, search the 60th floor thoroughly using satellite surveillance mode. Find Alan!"

Ark shouted when he suddenly heard.

*-Ark-nim, there is a surprise attack!*

Boramae's voice shook his eardrums sharply. Ark flinched and looked at the fortress as he asked.

*-Surprise? Surprise attack? What does that mean? The demons crossed the walls from outside?*

*-It isn't from outside. From behind.....is it the Avenger guild!*

*-Avenger? That.....*

What did that mean? The Avengers suddenly appeared in the fortress out of nowhere? But Ark was surrounded by demons and couldn't properly determine what was happening inside the fortress. The situation wasn't calm enough for him to ask.

"Everybody gather around me!"

Ark shouted after hearing Boramae's words. At the same time, he used Demonic Distortion and dozens of cursed japtem flew from his bag. Ark

used Demonic Distortion and swapped with the group of demons gathered by the wall. Even if he wanted to move inside the fortress, there were no demons inside for him to switch with. So Ark and the detachment suddenly appeared in a fierce battlefield.

“Damn, there’s nowhere to place my foot. Torrential Sword!”

“Maintain defense formation and retreat to the fortress. Riposte!”

Ark, Shambala and the soldiers pushed back the demons and retreated to the fortress. But he couldn’t see the Avengers that appeared inside the fort anymore.

“Boramae, what the hell happened?”

Ark ran up to Boramae and asked. Then Boramae answered with a puzzled expression.

“It happened so suddenly that I don’t understand the situation myself. Those guys appeared behind the fortress and headed towards the Hell Door. I belatedly discovered them but couldn’t chase after them with so troops because of the demons’ attacks. And Ark-nim also left some troops to guard the Hell Door so.....”

“Where did those guys appear?”

“T-that is.....”

“Did they appear inside the fortress? Do you know how? The 60th floor is a valley! It is impossible to come here without climbing over the walls! Even if they used some inconspicuous method, hundreds of Avengers crossing the walls should be noticed.....”

Ark shouted when he winced and shut his mouth. Then he looked around with stupid eyes before running somewhere. He rushed to the place where the Cyclops had thrown the giant maggots and examined the bodies of the dead Kurak. A desperate light filled Ark’s eyes as he saw the dead bodies.

“This is.....!”

Ark murmured as he bit his lip. The demons all-out attack, the doppelgangers transforming into Alan to lure Ark out.....the whole situation was for only one purpose. To allow Alan and the Avengers to infiltrate the fortress! That’s right. Like Ark said before, there was no reach for Alan to reach the Hell Door unless he passed through the fortress. The walls had various devices on them while the sky was blocked by the metal lattice. And even if some monsters crossed the walls, the Hell Door was defended by 400 elite members. There was no way for even an ant to enter the Hell Door unless the fortress fell. At least that’s what Ark thought. But there was a gap. No, to be exact a gap had been made. That’s right. This battle had proceeded under Alan’s scenario from the beginning.

‘The attack on the fortress wasn’t to prevent us from building it up.’

That was what Ark had thought at the time. When Ark saw the strategy of the Cyclops and Kurak, he just thought that Alan was impatient. In fact, the strategy of throwing the Kurak into the fortress wasn’t meaningless. It dealt damage to the fortress and the Kurak also shaved away some of the soldiers’ health.

“But the Kurak’s main purpose is different.”

“Main purpose?”

“The Kurak was used to secretly transport Alan and the Avengers.”

Ark muttered sharply.

“Transport? What.....huck! D-don’t tell me.....?”

Shambala who was looking confused suddenly flinched as he saw the Kurak. He ran to the one of the Kurak and wielded his dagger. The side of the Kurak was split and revealed a large, empty space. The stomach of the Kurak was large enough that 10 adult men could sufficiently hide in it.

“Unbelievable.....!”

Shambala finally understood the situation. The Kurak were huge demons dozens of metres large. And they possessed the habit of swallowing their prey. Alan used this habit of the Kurak. Alan had divided the Avengers into units of 10 and put them inside the Kurak. Then the Cyclops had thrown the Kurak inside the fortress. Ark thought Alan was trying to damage the fortress and deliberately lured them to the rear of the fortress. The rear of the fortress.....right on the doorstep of hell.

At this point, Ark had already lost the battle against Alan. Alan had used Ark to help him infiltrate right to the door of hell.

However, there was a checkpoint Alan and the Avengers still had to cross before they could enter the Hell Door. It was the 400 elite members that Shambala had selected to protect the Hell Door.

Around 50 Kurak had fallen into the fortress before Ark had neutralized the Cyclops using Confusion. If he calculated that there were 10 in each Kurak, that was 500 Avenger members. If those many enemies launched a surprise attack then they could penetrate the elite crew. However, Ark's group was inside the fortress. If Alan's group conflicted with Ark then they would receive the concentrated attack of 1,500 people. If Alan died in battle then the situation would end. That was why Alan lured out Ark using the doppelgangers.

“This is Alan's plan. He knew that the doppelgangers would be discovered by Curio after the Cyclops became confused. Then I would obviously move out. And I would take some troops with me to deal with the doppelgangers. Meanwhile they can take care of the elite troops guarding the Hell Door.....dammit!”

Ark cursed and kicked the Kurak's body. That's right. While Ark and Shambala were dealing with the doppelgangers, Alan and the Avengers had strolled right through the door into hell. It was like the Trojan Horse in the myths.

“Damn, then what did we do all that work for?”

“What happens now? We should pursue them immediately.....”

Boramae started calling for soldiers.

“I will only pursue them with Shambala and the selected detachment.”

“Huh?”

“We’ve only been able to stop the 6,000 monsters with 2,000 troops because of the fortress. The moment we give up the fortress then we’ll become the demons’ prey. We have to defend the fortress until the very last moment.”

This was also a part of Alan’s plan. Even if Ark read Alan’s movements, he would only be able to mobilize 400 people. Alan’s plan to tie up the ankles of the soldiers had worked.

“Looking at the Kurak, Alan should only have 500 people. If I catch him before he floods the Hell River then I can win against those numbers. Shambala and the detachment will enter the Hell Door with me. Boramae, this is Alan’s plan so the attack from the demons will strengthen from now on. Defend this fortress unless I give any orders.”

He didn’t have time to consider various situations any more. Ark immediately led Shambala and the detachment through the Hell Door. It had been 5 minutes since Alan and the Avengers pass through the Hell Door. Yet when he had previously entered the Hell Door, he hadn’t seen any device to make the river flood. He hadn’t seen anything at the crystal temple that he destroyed.

‘Then the device which will flood the Hell River must be hidden somewhere. Hopefully Alan will wander around trying to find the device.’

This was Ark’s only hope. But even those expectations were crushed when he passed through the Hell Door.

“What on earth?”



Ark muttered with a foolish expression. When Ark first came here, the Hell River had been right in front of the entrance. But now the Hell River in front of him was divided in half just like Moses divided the Red Sea. And a long passage stretched in the centre of the divided Hell River. One word floated in Ark's head at the sight of the divided Hell River.

"Hell Stone!"

The Hell Stone was the mysterious artifact Alan had seized from Shangri-La. According to the information from the History Crystal, the Hell Stone had the power to control the Hell River. The Hell Stone parting like the Red Sea was due to the Hell Stone.

".....Is it already too late?"

"The Hell River hasn't flooded yet!"

Shambala tapped Ark's shoulder while he was making a hopeless expression and ran down the passage. Ark followed Shambala using Sprint and muttered.

"Yes, it's still.....not over yet!"

So they ran down the passage created by the split hell river. When the passage widened, an even more amazing scene appeared in front of them. At the end of the Hell River was the black crystal temple! The black crystal temple had been replicated at the end of the passage. And before the crystal temple.....

"Alan!"

Ark cried out as he rushed down the passage towards the crystal temple. The person standing before an altar turned around.

"..... It's too late."

Alan, the man wearing black armour muttered. Timosi and the 500 Avenger members were gathered around Alan. But Ark and Shambala weren't looking at them.

“W-what is going on?”

One of the soldiers muttered with a puzzled voice. Ark flinched and took a step back as he saw a huge object in front of Alan.

Dukong, dukong, dukong, dukong.

A huge black heart was in front of Alan. It was a huge heart at least 10 metres in size! The heart was placed on the altar that was carved in the shape of a beast like an offering. The crystal temple vibrated with each pounding of the heart. Ark's group was 100 metres away and they could clearly feel the vibration. Ark gazed at the heart warmly before beginning to talk.

“You figured out my purpose and came here. But the heart is already in my hands.”

“Heart? Your purpose is the heart?”

What was he saying? Alan made an absurd expression after seeing Ark's bewildered look.

“What? You didn't know about the heart? Then....aha, you thought I came all this way just to flood the Hell River and submerge Nagaran. Kukuku, what silly behaviour. I overestimated you. I thought you've changed but you're still just a little bug trembling for money. Well, okay. I will step on the bug and kill it.”

“You're still chattering on. As you said, I don't know your purpose. But I'm not interested. If you're going to keep on talking about your purpose then that will change. Talking like that is a big mistake.”

Ark smiled and muttered. In fact, Ark had thought Alan's purpose was to flood the Hell River. Then it would've been the end if Alan arrived at the altar first. But if Alan kept on talking about the heart then it changed. The heart that was 10 metres large was more like a structure than an item. In other words, a user would be unable to put it in their bags. The fact that Alan was watching the heart meant he couldn't place it in his bag. If Alan's purpose was to flood the river then he would've already

achieved it. However, it would be more difficult if he wanted to seize the heart. It meant Ark just had to snatch the huge heart.

'If I stop him from getting the heart then I can prevent the river from flooding!'

That was the reason Ark recovered his spirit. Then Alan giggled and said.

"I know what you're thinking. But didn't I already say it? You're too late."

At the same time, an intense glare occurred behind Alan. And intense sparks spread over the huge black heart and it disappeared. Ark, Shambala and their group couldn't understand what had happened. Wormer who was watching from behind ran out and shouted.

"Ah! T-that.....that's mine? It is my quantum transmitter that was located at my secret base!"

That's right. The device hidden behind the heart was the quantum machine that Wormer invented. The quantum machine had moved the heart somewhere else. But how did Alan get his hands on the transmitter? The answer was simple. Ark and Wormer had trapped Alan in the underground base. When they visited the base again later, Ark and Wormer found that all the inventions were smashed. The thing they hadn't considered was that Alan smashed all the inventions to hide that he stole the quantum transmitter.

'That's right. Alan ignored the troops and headed straight to the heart because he had the quantum transmitter. Damn, is he going to flood the Hell River now?'

Ark considered the situation and quickly shouted.

"Everybody, the target is Alan! Kill Alan!"

"I said it was too late."

Alan said as Ark and Shambala flew towards him. Alan laughed and laid a black stone on the altar. Then the altar made of bone split in half and revealed a lever. Alan pulled the lever and smiled.

“Kukuku, this is my gift to you. Your ruin.”

A red warning message appeared in front of Ark.

-The Hell Altar has been used!

The Hell Altar is the device to flood the Hell River. When the device is used, the magic of the Hell River will go out of control and will gradually rise. It can't be stopped until the whole area is flooded.

“You, you bastard!”

“This degree is enough for now.”

Alan made a playful expression and struck the altar with his sword. Then cracks like spider webs spread on the Hell Altar.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

The river that was split in half started shaking. It was the sound of destruction in Ark's head.

“T-the Hell River is moving.....”

The soldiers looked around with confused eyes. As soon as the Hell Altar broke, the river surrounding the temple started changing. It fluctuated like it was a living creature. No, to be exact it was the humans and beasts floating on the Hell River.....the transparent existences convulsed as they rubbed against each other. The hundreds and thousands of souls suddenly opened their eyes. At the same time, tears of blood started falling from their eyes. It was an eerie scene from a horror movie! An unearthly scream rocked the area.

Kkiyaaaaaah, kkiyaaaaaah!

It was a sharp scream which pierced the eardrums!

“Kuaaaak!”

“Huk, what the? This sound?”

“Ugh! It feels like my head is breaking!”

The soldiers moaned and blocked their ears after hearing the scream from the Hell River. But they couldn't block out the sound. The scream from the Hell River made their brains feel like it was going to explode. Therefore Ark, Shambala, the soldiers and even Alan and the Avenger members screamed from the shock to their brains. All the people around the crystal temple fell into a state of panic as 'it' began. Millions.....the screams that burst from incalculable number of souls turned into a huge shockwave.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, jjajjajjang, jjajjajjang!

The soldiers were thrown back onto the ground from the enormous invisible power. The shockwave caused cracks to spread on the pillars and floor of the temple. However, that was just the beginning. The Hell River started to vibrate. It started to tremble like pudding. When the screams continued, it started to shake and gradually became bigger like a surging tsunami. And a huge whirlpool was produced with the crystal temple in the centre.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

“The temple is rising!”

One of the soldiers moaning on the ground muttered. His words were correct. He couldn't sense it clearly inside the crystal temple but it was rising. It was like a huge raft floating back and forth in the centre of the swirling Hell River.

“The Hell River.....it is flooding.....”

Ark muttered with a foolish expression. The situation became when he looked at the rising temple. The Hell River was like the floodgates to a dam blocking a huge river had been released. At this speed it would fill the hell immediately. And the place the Hell River was heading towards was the only exit, the Hell Door. No, it was the secret dungeon, Silvana and then Nagaran. It was the true meaning of ruin.

“Now it’s all over.....”

Ark looked at the Hell Altar with a blank expression. The Hell Altar was the ancient device which controlled the Hell River..... Despite all his efforts, the altar had been triggered. And it was broken. That’s right. That was important. The trigger had been broken. Now all Ark could do was watch as the Hell River flooded Nagaran.

‘Wait?’

It was at that moment. Ark who was struggling in a sea of despair felt a spark of light in his head. Ark quickly looked around him. Thanks to the shockwave, his group was scattered all over the place. The shock wave didn’t do any damage but they were also in despair from witnessing the Hell River flooding. However Ark wasn’t looking for them.

‘Where on earth is he? Ah, there he is!’

Ark eyed a prone body on the ground near a pillar. Ark immediately rushed over and shook the body while shouting.

“Wormer!”

“Ugh, don’t shout! It feels like my ears will break!”

The lump of flesh.....Wormer shouted angrily.

“I don’t have time to talk. Did you see the Hell Altar?”

“Hell Altar? That thing?”

Wormer looked at the altar split in half. Ark nodded and said.

“Can it be repaired?”

That’s right. This was the method Ark came up with. The altar had been activated but Silvana wasn’t submerged yet. This was the lowest layer of the secret dungeon. The Hell River was out of control but didn’t he still have time before it left? Then what if he could seal the altar back up? He might be able to stop the Hell River from going out of control. The problem is that the altar had been destroyed in hell right away! Ark had thought everything was ended.....too many incidents happened in a short time that he could hardly think. Broken things could be repaired. This was the idea that passed through his head. And didn’t Ark have a great mechanic with him? But Wormer looked at the Hell Altar and shook his head.

“I don’t know. I can’t imagine the type of mechanism that could control the Hell River.”

“Huh? Then?”

“But.....”

Wormer took out a spanner and laughed.

“The altar that Alan broke is nothing but a huge switch. So the altar is just a mechanical device. If I repair the broken circuits and replace the gear then it should be enough to fix it. Well, it is possible for me.”

‘That’s it. Then there is still hope!’

Ark asked with eager eyes.

“How long will it take?”

“I can’t know until I examine it myself.”

“Then hurry up!”

“Understood. But can you really stop the Hell River if I repair the altar?”

Wormer's question reminded him about the warning message that appeared. In fact, Ark had thought everything ended when the Hell Altar was triggered. But the warning message said that the magic had gone out of control and wouldn't stop until the whole area was submerged. In other words, wasn't there something to stop the magic from going out of control? That's right. The warning message let him know that something could stop the Hell River.

"It can stop. No, it's going to stop!"

Ark exclaimed in a decisive voice.

"That confidence can't appear out of nowhere. Okay, I'll display my capabilities."

Wormer smiled and ran towards the altar.

If Wormer repaired the altar then the problem of the Hell River flooring would be solved. However, he had to leave it to Wormer.

'Then the work I have to do.....'

Ark pulled out his sword and turned around. Wormer needed time to repair the altar to stop the flooding. The Hell Altar was just a mechanical device. And the Hell Stone was the artifact that controlled the Hell River. It was the black stone Alan was holding in his hand. Alan and the Avengers were also scattered because of the shock wave. While Wormer was running to the altar, Alan laughed and raised the Hell Stone.

"I can guess what your idea is. Do you want this?"

Ark grinned and nodded.

"I want it. I will cut your neck to get it."

"Didn't you confirm the other day that your skills aren't enough?"

"Why don't we confirm it again?"

"I would love to but....."



Alan stared at him before shaking his head.

“I don’t have time to play with you today.”

“What?”

“Ark, that is.....the magic charger!”

Wormer shouted from the altar. Ark’s eyes caught Jewel quickly moving towards Alan. No, he saw the object Jewel was holding. It was a large cylindrical object made with a silver metal. Ark had previously seen it in Wormer’s secret base.

If Ark’s memory was correct.....

-Magic Charger

Type: 3rd grade invention

Design and Production: Wormer

A type of battery that can store magic energy. It can store 5,000 MG at one time. If all the MG is consumed then it is possible to charge it and use it again. This magic charger was made using Wormer’s specific standards.

“Damn, that’s mine. These thieves!”

Wormer grinded his teeth together. However, Ark didn’t care about who was the owner of the charger.

‘MG battery! Don’t tell me.....?’

Panic spread on Ark’s face as he remembered the information about the magic charger. In fact, Ark had come up with the way to stop the Hell River by assuming that Alan couldn’t use the quantum transmitter again. Once the quantum machine was used, it needed to be charged with MG to be used again. Therefore the quantum transmitter became like scrap iron after it was used once. That was Ark’s

reasoning. However, the situation was different if Alan had a magic charger.

“Why do you look surprised?”

Alan grinned and muttered.

“Didn’t I say it? The reason I came here was to look for the heart as well as flooding the Hell River. The heart is ours now. Did you really think we wouldn’t come prepared to use the quantum transmitter twice? Did you expect that I would flood the Hell River and die along with you? I don’t regard my life that cheaply.”

Alan raised a finger. Jewel smiled and placed the charger into the quantum transmitter. Sparks flew from the antenna attached to the top of the machine. Alan was going to disappear with the Hell Stone! Ark instantly used Sprint and shouted.

“Wait. You bastard, are you running away?”

“The dog who lost the fight is barking louder.”

Alan muttered with a smug expression. Timosi hooked her arms with Alan’s and shouted.

“Bye. You guys can enjoy swimming in the Hell River!”

The sparks gradually intensified as they revolved around Alan and the Avengers. At the same time, Alan and the Avengers turned into light and was sucked into the antenna. Ark’s eyes darkened as he saw the scene from dozens of metres away.

“U-unbelievable……!”

Alan had run away. And there was no method to chase after them.

Jiiiiiiik, kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

500 lights spun towards the ceiling. This was the moment Nagaran was confirmed to be ‘ruined.’ No, just as he thought that.

.....Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

“What, what the?”

Ark’s eyes widened as he heard a thud. Alan and the Avengers had been successfully converted to quantum matter. And they were moving somewhere through the antenna. At this point, there were no problems and everything was as it should be. Yet some unexpected developments occurred. The beam fired from the antenna hit the ceiling and bounced around several places. After bouncing around for a while, the light was sucked back into the antenna. There was a huge flash and sparks rose on the quantum transmitter. The sparks soon turned into Alan and the Avenger members.

“What is this?”

“Ugh, this is?”

Ark watched with bewilderment as Alan appeared on the ground again. The reaction of the Avenger guild members and Wormer who was the inventor of the quantum machine was the same. No one could understand what had happened. Jewel looked at the quantum machine and murmured.

“Strange. It says that the frequency of the receiver wasn’t caught!”

“What do you mean? Didn’t the heart disappear without any problems just now?”

“I don’t know.....the machine must be broken if the frequency can’t be caught.”

“What? Broken? The inventions I made won’t break so easily!”

Wormer shouted angrily after hearing Jewel’s words. The quantum transmitter was a machine which allowed spatial movement. Once the receiver was placed then the quantum material would be transmitted along that frequency. If the frequency wasn’t caught then the spatial movement would be cancelled. He didn’t know why the frequency of

the receiver placed beforehand wasn't working. The reason wasn't important to Ark. The important thing was that Alan had failed to disappear!

"Summon Demon, Curio! Go!"

"Okay, Dark Dash!"

Curio shot forward like an arrow. He flew dozens of metres and crashed into Alan's head while he was looking at Jewel.

The crash to the skull caused a dark fog to cover his eyes. The sudden blow would cause him to be in a 'blinded' state.

"Ugh! T-this bastard...!"

Alan belatedly noticed and swung his sword. However, swinging his sword randomly wouldn't work against Curio.

"Bah, take this! Nostril destruction!"

Curio avoided the sword and lowered his body. Then he extended both arms and thrust his fingers into Alan's nostrils. The blinded Alan couldn't imagine the situation and fell to the ground from the attack.

"Kekekeke. That's what you get for throwing me to Infector."

Curio laughed as he removed his fingers from the bloody nose. The sight of a bat taking down the cocky Alan would stay with him for at least 10 years. But Ark didn't have time to enjoy the spectacle. When Alan fell to the ground, the Hell Stone had been thrown into the air and bounced off a rock.

"Sprint!"

"S-stop him!"

Ark sprinted forward with his eyes locked on the Hell Stone. The Avenger members belatedly realized the situation and got up before rushing towards Ark. They formed a wall in front of him while some of them threw their bodies and tried to tackle Ark.

“Dark Dance!”

Ark used Dark Dance to avoid the assault. When he faced the human wall, he used their knees and shoulders as a springboard to jump towards the Hell Stone.

“Matanyi Shooter no. 1 Devil Penetrating Arrow!”

Timosi who had been watching from afar shot an arrow. However, the goal of the arrow wasn't Ark. The arrow struck the Hell Stone. Thanks to that, the Hell Stone was thrown in the opposite direction.

“Kuack, dammit! Curio!”

Ark quickly commanded Curio to retrieve the Hell Stone. Meanwhile Timosi was continuously rotating her body and unleashing a barrage of arrows.

“Bah, that stupid bat! Matanyi Shooter no. 2, Devil's Chasing Arrow!”

“Hik! Why does that Dark Elf keep on shooting arrows at me?”

Curio screamed as the arrows flew towards him. Curio flapped his wings and turned but the Devil's Chasing Arrow was an arrow that pursued until the target was hit. The arrow moved like a guided missile towards Curio's butt. Just before it hit Curio's butt!

Syu syu syu syu, chaengkang!

A sharp metal impacted with the arrow. Another dagger also flew towards Timosi who was unleashing another arrow. Timosi did a handspring and avoided the arrow.

“That abnormal bastard.....!”

“You stupid female, I won't let you freely run wild.”

Shambala raised his dagger and muttered. Thanks to Shambala distracting Timosi, Curio was able to reach the Hell Stone. No, just as he was about to grab it.

“Hehehehe, I will grab this.”

“Blast of Wind!”

Jewel raised his staff and shouted. A gust of wind wound around Curio and pushed him back several metres.

“Ugh, that damn magician!”

Curio glared at Jewel. However, Jewel was looking elsewhere. It wasn't just Jewel. Ark and Shambala's group had 400 people. Including Timosi and Jewel, the Avengers had 500 people. The 900 pairs of eyes were focused on one spot.....

Tuk, tuk tuk, degul degul.

The Hell Stone was rolling around the floor of the crystal temple. The fate of Nagaran depended on that Hell Stone! Everybody here knew how important the Hell Stone was.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

Meanwhile, the Hell River was being larger and even more unstable. The walls of the hell wasn't able to withstand it and was cracking. However, none of the soldiers were looking at the Hell River anymore. Their bodies tensed as they started at the place where the Hell Stone had fallen. After a moment, the Avengers and the soldiers simultaneously moved towards the Hell Stone.

“Waaaaahhhh!”

“Grab the Hell Stone!”

“Don't allow them to get the Hell Stone!” The 900 soldiers scattered all over the place all flocked towards the Hell Stone. One Avenger that was closest threw his body towards the Hell Stone and shouted.

“I got it! The Hell Stone....kuack!”

But the Avenger's words instantly turned to a scream. Dozens of soldiers had jumped onto his body. Therefore the Avenger was crushed like a frog and missed the Hell Stone. The soldiers threw their body, was crushed, another one threw their body and the situation repeated many times..... In the end, the 900 soldiers were layered on top of each other like a small mountain.

"Kuack! Out of my way!"

"Where is the Hell Stone?"

"Dammit, is somebody stepping on my face?"

"Who is touching my ass?"

Screams emerged here and there from the pile of bodies. They were so jumbled up that nobody could distinguish friend from foe. And there was no need to verify it. They only came for one thing, the Hell Stone! The soldiers crowded and stepped on each other to find the Hell Stone.

'Hell Stone, Hell Stone....find it!'

Ark also dug into the huge mountain of flesh to look for the Hell Stone. However, it was impossible to even distinguish the ground from the bodies.

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Then Radun suddenly flicked his tongue and moved somewhere. He crawled through the many piles of soldiers.

'Yes, Radun's Stalking! Radun has found the Hell Stone!'

Ark watched gleefully as Radun continued moving. After a moment, he could finally see the Hell Stone stuck between some soldiers. Ark was 3 metres away from it. However, it felt like 300 metres away thanks to the crush of soldiers. He could only depend on Radun to get the Hell Stone. No matter how mixed up the soldiers were, Radun was determined to

make it through. Radun's unique flexibility allowed him to reach the Hell Stone little by little.

'Well done Radun. A bit more.....a bit more.....!'

Just as Radun was almost at the Hell Stone.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was an abrupt roar and the whole temple shook. The soldiers flew all over the place from the impact. And the Hell Stone that had almost entered Radun's mouth flew somewhere.

"D-dammit!"

Ark cursed as he rolled along the ground. Then he raised his head and stiffened. Ark wasn't the only one with this reaction. The 900 soldiers scattered all around also looked surprised.

.....It was collapsing. The Hell Door that had been blocking the Hell River until now was collapsing. The Hell River had strong curse magic and the Hell Door couldn't withstand it any longer. When the Hell Door collapsed, the crystal temple was caught up in the swirl of water. The walls surrounding the Hell Door also started to collapse. With the only barrier gone, there was nothing stopping the Hell River anymore. The continuously rising Hell River would be pushed outside the Hell Door.

Now the countdown to Nagaran's ruin had begun.

### **Act 3: Flood, Hell River (II)**

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The rocks surrounding the Hell Door fell down into the Hell River. A huge spray of water rose and poured over the temple.

The water from the Hell River was filled with the forms of the cursed



evil spirit. Every time a drop filled with evil spirit fell on the soldiers, it caused an electric shock.

-You have touched the Hell River.

If you touch it then you will lose 100 health per second>

A red warning message floated in front of Ark's dumbfounded face. Ark realized that he had forgotten something important.

'The coalition members!'

That's right. The coalition members were fighting against the demons on the 60th floor. The Hell River contained deadly poison that was like hydrochloric acid. If the Hell River poured from the Hell Door to the 60th floor then all the coalition members would be dissolved in moments. Furthermore, he had only brought users along with him to fight Alan. In other words, the 1,500 Meow, Wolrang, raccoons and Eastern Nation were still protecting the fort..... They were the NPC members of Dark Eden. And the NPC members were the main axis of Dark Eden!

'But it'll be too late even if I give the order to escape now.....'

It was only a matter of time until the Hell Door collapsed. Once it did, the Hell River would flow out to the 60th floor. No matter how quick the coalition members were, there was no way they could escape from the 60th floor in time. With how quickly the Hell River would rise after entering the 60th floor, they wouldn't be able to escape the secret dungeon at all. Weren't there also thousands of demons blocking the front of the fortress? Then Ark thought of a brilliant idea.

'I don't know if it's possible but it is the only way!'

Ark instantly sent a whisper to Boramae who was the commander of the fort.

*-Boramae, it is an emergency!*

*-Ark-nim, what was that shock just now?*

*-There's no time to explain. Give up the fortress and retreat immediately!*

*-Retreat? We're retreating? Retreat to where?*

Boramae asked in an amazed voice after hearing Ark's order.

*-In the underground closed room.*

*-The closed room? The place we made when we were hiding?*

*-Yes, retreat to that room right away with the troops. Make them blow up the entrance to completely seal it off. Don't let even a single drop of water enter. Do you understand?*

This was the best course of action that Ark could come up with. Ark had previously commanded them to make a closed room on the 60th floor. It had a narrow passage in a rock wall which led to a wide stone room. The length of the passage was approximately 20 metres. In other words, the room was surrounded by 20 metres of rock walls. It was possible to avoid the Hell River in there. Of course, this was just a temporary solution. If the 60th floor was flooded then the closed room would eventually be as well. No, if the entrance was blocked because of that then they would suffocate from a lack of oxygen first. Anyway, if the Hell River wasn't sealed then all of Nagaran would disappear. Then he wouldn't have to worry about the alliance members anymore.

*-Blowing up the entrance.....*

*-There's no time to explain!*

*-.....I understand.*

Boramae answered after hearing Ark's desperate tone and cut off communications. Now the life of his alliance members depended on how fast Boramae ran.

*'I have to regain the Hell Stone and reseal the Hell River!'*

But finding the Hell Stone was an even more confusion situation. Due to the shaking of the crystal temple, everybody was jumbled up like a cocktail had been shaken. Not only did the 900 soldiers fly away in every direction, there was no way to even tell where the Hell Stone was. Pieces of the crystal temple had broken and small crystal pieces were scattered all over the place. The temple was made of black crystal while the Hell Stone was also black. Looking for the Hell Stone in a pile of crystals was like finding a needle in a desert. However, this wasn't bad for Ark.

"Radun, find the Hell Stone!"

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun dropped down from his waist and looked around with glittering eyes. He flicked his tongue from side to side before pointing towards one side.

-Radun's search target: Hell Stone search mode.

<Radun's search target: the Hell Stone has been sensed 200 metres away in the 3 o'clock direction>

"Okay, let's go!"

Ark instantly ran to a pile of crystal that Radun indicated.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

However, he had only taken a few steps before the temple started shaking uncontrollably. Then the floor suddenly inclined at a sharp angle.

'The Hell Door has broken!'

That's right. In the end, the Hell Door wasn't able to withstand the pressure any longer and broke. The Hell River quickly rushed out after the Hell Door broke. The Hell River pushed out like a swirling storm into the secret dungeon! The crystal temple was located in the centre of

the swirl, just like the eye of a cyclone and it was embroiled in the torrent that rushed out the Hell Door. Therefore the crystal pieces and soldiers all fell to one side. Most of them grabbed onto the cracked ground or pillar but some unfortunately soldiers were thrown out the crystal shrine into the Hell River.

“Waaaaah!”

“Huck! S-save me!”

The evil spirits flocked around the soldiers that had fallen into the river. After a few seconds, the soldiers became pieces of bones like piranhas had attacked them. The fearful scene showed how toxic the Hell River was.

“This.....?”

Ark looked around as he held onto his sword that he plunged into the ground. The Hell Door was built directly in front of the fortress that contained thousands of demons. After the coalition members hid in the underground like Ark commanded, the demons had immediately entered the fortress. But before they could even enjoy their victory, the Hell River swept over the fortress like a tsunami. The demons fell into a state of panic and shrieked while running away.

*-Kiri, karam, keurama!*

*-Nohun, bakirama, kurara!*

However, the demons were like fleas running around the 60th floor.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The Hell River enveloped the demons in one huge breath. The fate of the demons caught in the swirl was gruesome. The thick leather that prevented the demons from being pierced with a knife was no use against something like this. The demons caught in the swirl seemed like they were caught in a grinder and shredded into chunks of meat. The

Hell River became a deep red colour from the blood of thousands of demons.

“There it is! The Hell Stone!”

Then he heard someone’s voice near him.

Ark who had been looking at the bloody Hell River flinched and turned. A pile of crystals had collapsed from the impact just then and the Hell Stone rolling out caught his eyes. The Hell Stone was also tumbling around everywhere thanks to the shaking of the temple. The soldiers would rush towards it whenever the Hell Stone rolled in their area. But the temple was still at a 30 degree tilt. The temple would shake again every time the river collided with the valley. Thanks to that, the soldiers rushing towards the Hell Stone lost their balance and died. Some of them even pulled the Avenger members with them. And they became minced meat. When the situation was like this, the soldiers and Avengers couldn’t easily move. It was a strange confrontation between two groups over the Hell Stone.....

However, those circumstances didn’t last long. The movement of the Hell River suddenly changed. The river had completely submerged the 60th floor and there was a moment of silence. Then a fierce geyser of water shot up near the crystal temple. And it started drilling a hole in the ceiling.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

There was a violent roar and the ceiling broke. It was like a scene where the demons of hell clawed through the ground with their claws. A groan flowed from Ark’s mouth at the unimaginable situation.

‘Oh my god, this is.....!’

Ark had thought the Hell River would flood from the 60th floor to the 59th floor to the 58th....the secret dungeon would gradually fill up and head towards the outside. Considering the Hell River’s speed, it would take at least a few hours to reach the outside. But if it penetrated through the ceiling then it would take less than an hour.

‘There’s no time!’

He couldn’t afford to relax now. Since the Hell River had calmed, the tilted temple returned to a flat position. While rocks still fell from the ceiling, it was better than when the temple was 30 degrees tilted.

“We can’t blindly chase after it. It will become too messy.”

Ark raised his body and shouted.

“All warriors rush and seal the movement of the Avengers! Meanwhile the archers and hunters should quickly seize the Hell Stone. The magicians in the rear will attack the Avengers searching for the Hell Stone!”

Based on his previous experience, blindly chasing after the Hell Stone wasn’t the right answer. In such confused circumstances, the soldiers would definitely have the disadvantage. The soldiers had 100 less members than the Avengers. Even if the altar was repaired, everything would be finished if they couldn’t get the Hell Stone. There was also no meaning if someone placed the Hell Stone in their bag and died. On the other hand, the Avengers could place the Hell Stone in their bag and win. It really was disadvantageous to the soldiers in every way.

‘But Alan and the Avenger members are confused because the quantum transmitter didn’t work properly. This is the only chance to obtain the Hell Stone. The game starts now!’

This was the quick conclusion Ark came up with. The soldiers immediately organized themselves according to Ark’s order.

“Hap, hap, hap, hap!”

“Go!”

When the signal rang out, they simultaneously ran towards to Hell Stone. Meanwhile, the soldiers moved towards the Avengers. “Warriors block them from both sides and secure a path!” The warriors followed Ark’s instructions and stopped the Avengers from mobbing. The sound

of hundreds of warriors clashing rang out. While the warriors were stopping each other, the archers and hunters rushed towards the Hell Stone. But this was different from a football game.

“Damn, stop them!”

Dozens of magic blasts flew from the other side. At the same time, a 100 metres area became wrapped in a black aura.

-You have entered the influential range of ‘Blackout.’

\* Due to the magical smoke screen, the vision of all life forms within the 100 metres area will be limited.

\* There is no way to expand the limited view using magic or skills.

\* The effect will only be displayed at night or in a dungeon.

The message window appeared in front of all the soldiers. The Avengers saw the soldiers’ methodical movements and used Blackout to prevent them from finding the Hell Stone. Thanks to the dense smoke screen it was impossible to distinguish between rocks or the Hell Stone. Contrary to Ark’s intention, once again it became a scene of confusion and disorder.

“I got it! The Hell Stone!”

“Bah, not a chance. Rush!”

“Ugh, this bastard.....ah, my hell stone!”

“Kukuku, I caught it!”

“Don’t be ridiculous. Heroic Strike!”

Shouts poured out from the smoke screen. Dozens of skills flew around in the vicinity of the Hell Stone. Whenever someone grabbed the stone, a skill would be used to stop them. Therefore the Hell Stone switched hands between the soldiers and the Avengers many times.

‘.....We’re being pushed!’

Ark looking at the situation he could see through the smoke screen with irritation. It was 400 against 500. The numbers were against them but Ark thought they could win if they faced the Avengers. The reason was due to his level. While Ark was distracting Alan on the 59th floor, he had looked at the Avengers using Eyes of the Cat. Their level was between 330~350. On the other hand, the allied forces and Dark Eden had an average level of more than 350. He judged that the level difference would make up for the extra 100 troops. However, the actual results were unexpected. When facing them 1 on 1, the Avengers showed no sign of being pushed.

‘There can only be one reason. When I encountered Alan at Pabiun Canyon, I was pushed despite obviously being high levelled than him. Alan and the Avengers must have something to raise their stats!’

But now wasn’t the time to ponder the mystery. The problem was that his soldiers were dying.

‘If we’re pushed during these circumstances then it is the end!’

“Radun, use Stalking and secure the Hell Stone!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun shook his tail and went into the smoke. Ark also followed Radun in the scuffle and shouted.

“Summon Demon, Purital! Clad Armour!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Purital was summoned to the area behind Ark. As soon as Purital appeared, his bones were taken apart and reformed around Ark. The ribs split to cover his upper body while the skull covered his head like a helmet. The leg and arm bones twisted strangely and stuck to Ark’s gloves and shoes.



-You have used Clad Armour.

\* Damage will increase by 17~22.

\* Defense will increase by 98.

\* Health will increase by 1,866.

<If the 1,866 health is consumed then Clad Armour will automatically dismantle>

“Hook Explosion!”

When he used the skill, 4 hooks shot from Ark’s body. The hooks wound around a pillar and he flew into the smoke screen.

“Eh, what the?”

“Ark! Kill him!”

When he entered the smoke, the Avengers ran to him immediately.

“These children.....Dark Dance!”

Ark’s body disappeared like a ghost. It wasn’t easy for someone to catch Ark when he used Dark Dance in broad daylight. It was impossible in a dark dungeon filled with smoke.

“Huck! W-where is he?”

The Avengers said as they lost sight of their quarry. But before their confusion could disappear, a dark blade shot through the darkness and dealt a critical blow to an Avenger member. It was like an invisible ghost holding a blade was mocking them. He used the chain skill of Dark Dance and Dark Blade. With Ark helping, the battle in the smoke screen instantly tilted to the side of the soldiers. Ark yelled out when he had taken care of all the surrounding Avengers.

“That’s it! Radun, find the Hell Stone!”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun crawled on the ground and licked it with his tongue. During that short time, he had sensed the Hell Stone within the smoke.

‘Okay, the Avengers are unaware of Radun’s presence because of the smoke.’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him. All of a sudden he had his health sucked out? At the same time, a warning message flashed before his eyes.

-Your pet ‘Radun’ has been forcefully recalled to the Netherworld.

You have received 50% of the Familiar’s health as damage.

“What, what the? R-Radun.....?”

Ark burst out after seeing the perplexing message. Suddenly there was a flash through the smoke screen. Ark reflexively turned his body towards the flash. In the midst of the smoke was someone wearing shining black armour. But Ark’s eyes weren’t looking at the man. He was looking at the snake pierced through by the sword the man was holding. It was Radun. He had been looking for the Hell Stone and encountered the man! Ark slowly looked at the dead body before it disappeared. And he glared at the man in black armour.

“.....Alan!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The crystal shrine started rising along with the Hell River. The river was like a giant creature digging through the ground. The river rose through the penetrated ceiling and had already submerged half of the secret dungeon. The crystal shrine also received large amounts of damage. While the river was blasting through the ceiling, it was pouring down rocks onto the crystal shrine. Every time the ceiling opened, a huge rock would fall and break a part of the temple’s floor. The situation became

even more confused inside the temple. The whereabouts of the Hell Stone became unclear.

Once again, finding the black Hell Stone among the rocks and black crystal pieces was like finding a needle in a desert.

Meanwhile, the magicians continually feared that someone from the opposite site would find the Hell Stone and continually used Blackout. Thanks to that, the crystal temple became completely enveloped in a dense smoke screen. The hundreds of people entangled in the smoke screen could only see 4~5 metres around them. The screams and iron clashing sounds that came from everywhere meant he couldn't accurately grasp the war situation.

Jjang!

A violent metallic sound was heard from the smoke. Two blades collided with each other and caused constant flashes. Once one flash occurred, a different one occurred several metres away from the first. When that flash disappeared, another one would occur in a different place so that it seemed like dozens of people were taking a photo. After a long time.....

Ka ka ka kang, chaechang!

The intense flash of light occurred when two people conflicted. Wearing black armour and leather armour, the two people were Ark and Alan. The two of them had only been clashing swords for a few minutes. However both of them looked like they had been fighting for a couple of hours. Their mantles were ripped to shreds while the armour was also covered in small tears. Their swords that collided without any rests seemed like they were going to break. It was possible to guess how intense the 5 minute battle had been from that alone. Their two swords clashed and pushed against each other, causing Alan to pant out breathlessly.

"That Ark bastard....."

“Huck huck, don’t call me names. Don’t you know it makes me feel dirty?”

“.....I’ll kill you.”

“Can you really say that when you lost your breath like a puppy?”

“You’ll see soon.”

A black aura exploded from Alan’s body. He instantly felt an enormous pressure on his sword. It felt like he was being pushed with enormous pressure! Ark was forced to his knees from Alan’s tremendous power as his sword was pushed downwards. Eventually Alan’s sword slid off Ark’s and struck the ground with a large spark.

Kwajajajak!

A thick crack spread on the ground and crystal debris shot from the ground. The sharp edges of the crystal tore the skin and fresh blood splattered. But Ark and Alan didn’t blink once. They knew that looking away for one minute could mean the difference between victory or defeat.

“Evil Insight!”

A ray shot from Alan’s eyes. Ark rolled on the ground and avoided the ray.

“Inferno!”

Alan followed Ark’s movements while shooting flames from his mouth. Ark hurriedly placed his hands on the floor and kicked upwards, hitting Alan’s jaw. Alan’s jaw was pushed upwards and the flames gushed towards the sky.

‘This is a chance!’

Ark moved his body like a squirrel and rolled under Alan’s foot. He felt a pain in his side the moment he tried to kick Alan.  
At that moment, Alan lowered his sword and attacked. Thanks to the

unexpected attack in his side, Ark was hit by Alan's counterattack and he fell. He rolled several metres before finally raising his body. However, he had no time to catch his breath. A sword with a black energy was descending on his head like a lightning bolt. Ark hurriedly lifted his sword and the shock felt like his shoulders had been hit by a hammer.

"Ugh!"

A moan flowed from firmly closed lips. However, Ark who was lying on the ground kicked out and hit Alan's leg. Alan lost his balance and stumbled. Meanwhile, Ark grasped Alan's leg and rolled along the ground. Thanks to Ark rolling on the ground while grasping his foot, Alan naturally fell as well. It was a chance to attack Alan!

"Alan! Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!"

Then a black shadow appeared dozens of metres away from Ark. It was the Dark Elf with black hair that fluttered like a cape! The Dark Elf Timosi! Ark reflexively turned to look at the voice. Then an arrow flew through the smoke to hit his shoulder. Alan instantly raised his body during that gap. Timosi shot another arrow at the same time.

"Matanyi Shooter no. 2, Devil Chasing Arrow!"

The arrow launched was the ones that would chase the target until it hit! Ark popped up in front of Alan the moment the arrow was shot. Then Alan who had got up swung his sword. Ark instantly used Dark Dance and rotated around Alan, changing their locations. The arrow that had been chasing after Ark lodged itself into Alan's shoulder.

"Kyaaak! A-Alan!"

Timosi was startled as Alan was hit. Alan blocked Ark's follow-up attack and shook his head.

"Ugh, I'm fine! Timosi, don't worry about this battle!"

"B-but...."

"Can't you see? Your arrows aren't helpful in this situation. Pay attention to the altar."

"Altar?"

"Yes, I've left the altar to Jewel but then I got involved in the fight and haven't contacted him. Leave me and dispose of the guy repairing the altar!"

"I understand!"

Timosi nodded and turned her body. When Timosi disappeared towards the altar, Alan pulled out the arrow from his shoulder and laughed.

"Come Ark! What will you do now?"

Ark's eyes shook as he breathed harshly. In fact, the altar had also been weighing on Ark's mind. In this confused situation, there was no way to predict who could get their hands on the Hell Stone. But there was a way for Alan to achieve his goal even if he didn't obtain the Hell Stone. It was the Hell Altar! If anyone got rid of Wormer who was repairing the Hell Altar then it didn't matter who obtained the Hell Stone. With the whereabouts of the Hell Stone unclear, the battle had started focusing on the altar. Now Timosi had received the assassination order and was heading towards Wormer. It was the most unbearable situation in Ark's view. But a small smile still spread on Ark's face.

"Let's see? Will it really be as easy as you think?"

"That pig, I'll catch you! Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!"

Then Timosi's sharp voice was heard over the noise of the battlefield. He couldn't see because of the smoke but Timosi had approached Wormer at the altar. But the next moment.....

"What, what the? That abnormal bastard.....!"

"I knew this female would appear again."

Alan's face warped as he heard Shambala's voice. That's right. The reason Ark wasn't worried about the altar was because of Shambala. The altar was one of the two keys required to stop the Hell River. How could he leaving Wormer who was repairing such an important key alone? Ark was able to roam the battlefield freely because he had placed Shambala who was the most reliable person to guard Wormer. This was the reason why Shambala hadn't been fighting in the meantime.

"Matanyi Shooter no. 3, Devil's Stabbing Arrow!"

"Torrential Sword!"

Although it wasn't intended, once again it became a confrontation between Shambala and Timosi. Ark raised his sword and laughed.

"Now, shall we start again? Or do you want a little break?"

".....This impertinent brat!"

Kwa kwang, kakakakak, kwa kwa kwa kwa kwang!

'Damn, this bastard.....'

Ark breathed roughly and glared at Alan. In fact, Ark had been confident that he could beat Alan. That confidence didn't come out of nowhere. In the past Ark had been pushed back by Alan. But they were almost equal after using Purital's Clad Armour skill. And he also had the legendary sword Shining Darkness. Once again, upgrading weapons in battle had a profound effect in games. That was why users would risk their lives to gain a stronger weapon. And Shining Darkness was the highest ranked sword, a legendary weapon! Of course he would gain the upper hand with the legendary sword. However, the results weren't much different from the previous fights. Just like Ark gained the legendary sword, Alan had probably gained a new ability.

'This is really irritating.'

Alan must've come here thinking the same thing. The situation really was very irritating. Alan must be in the same position.....Thus the

frustrating and unyielding match between the two of them continued. But after a while, the balance collapsed in a way he never imagined.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The Hell River once again swirled and rose through the ceiling.

“Rocks are falling! Scatter!”

There was a violent roar and the crystal temple shook. At the same time, small and large rocks fell like hail. Although most of the rocks fell into the Hell River, around 100 of them struck the crystal temple. It just caused the battle between the two opposing sides to become even more confused. However, rocks weren't the only things that came pouring in.

Patter, patter.

A drop of water suddenly fell onto Ark. At first he thought it was the river water. But when he saw the stain on Alan's face, he realized that it wasn't a simple water drop.

.....Blood! Blood was dripping from above their heads. Ark wasn't the only one surprised by the situation. Alan's face also looked surprised after seeing the wet blood on Ark's face. The two of them raised their heads at the same time.

‘What the, that is?’

Pukakakaka, pukakakaka!

The Hell River was swirling at a fast rate around the temple. And a large number of demons were being grinded into mincemeat in the water?

‘Demons? What.....?’

Ark belatedly realized the identity of the demons. It was the demons that entered the secret dungeon just before Silvana was recaptured! After contacting Boramae on the 60th floor, he had also talked to JusticeMan and told the allied forces to retreat. The allied forces wouldn't be able to help with the Hell Altar and they hadn't



entered that long ago so they were able to escape from the secret dungeon. But the demon reinforcements had entered the secret dungeon a few hours earlier. While running through the dungeon, the ground had opened and they fell into the Hell River. That's right. The blood of demons was pouring over the crystal temple! The site of thousands of demons bleeding above them was a terrible scene. However, the truly horrible situation happened afterwards.

*-Kuram, kurama, kuram!*

*-Bahoguram, norun, kararara!*

The voices came from among the rocks falling from the ceiling. They were the red eyed demons. 100 demons falling from the ceiling were fortunate enough to avoid the Hell River and fell onto the crystal temple. 10,000 demons had entered the secret dungeon but only 100 of them had fallen onto the temple. Alan had calculated up to here which was why he hadn't ordered the demons to retreat.....Anyway, both Ark and the soldiers battled were shocked. Meanwhile Alan smiled at the sight of the demons.

"Exterminate them!"

*-Kurwarwarwarwa!*

The demons began to rampage after hearing Alan's order. Although the falling demons avoided the swirling water, they still lost between 30~50% health thanks to the fall damage. In particular, the Heavy Walkers that wore a lot of armour lost 70% of their health. But there were still 100 demons. That normally wouldn't be a problem. However, the present fight between the two opposing sides had been almost equal. When the 100 demons appeared, that balance was broken. It was the same for Ark.

"Dark Strike!"

When Ark swung his sword, a demon interrupted in front of him. Alan stepped out from behind the demon and attacked Ark.

“The Devil’s Fang!”

There were three different ways to fight an opponent. Locking weapons together, avoiding the opponent or close combat. The opponent could then avoid the attack or chose to attack back. But when the demons interrupted Ark’s attacks, his movements weren’t smooth anymore. Alan would take advantage of that gap to strike back. Of course, the demons weren’t at a level to really interrupt the battle between Alan and Ark. But with the interference of the demons, Ark had no choice but to be hit by some attacks. And this had devastating consequences to Ark.

-Purital’s health has been consumed and Clad Armour will disappear!

Purital will be forcibly recalled and you will be damaged by 50% of his health.

\* Purital’s 30% defense, attack and health bonus will disappear.

The bones around Ark disappeared as the message window appeared. This was the reason Ark had tried to avoid being hit. The 30% bonus that Purital’s armour gave to Ark made him equal to Alan. But if the 1,544 health given by Clad Armour was consumed then it would automatically be released. When that happened, Ark wouldn’t be a match for Alan anymore. That wasn’t all.

‘Dammit, nearly 4,000 health flew away!’

Clad Armour disappearing meant that Purital would be forcibly recalled. And Ark received 50% of his pet’s health as damage when they were recalled. Purital currently had 5,720 health. When Clad Armour turned off, Ark lost the extra health bonus as well as 2,860 health. Clad Armour was released and he received 2,860 damage. This was a deadly penalty against an opponent like Alan.

‘Dammit.....!’

Ark was continuously pressed by the attacks of Alan and the demons. Once Clad Armour disappeared, all of Alan's attacks felt like a hammer were beating on him. The soldiers were also being pushed back by the demons and the Avenger members. With their health already low, 100 soldiers quickly died.

'This is ridiculous! I rallied tens of thousands of people to save Nagaran yet we're going to be defeated because of 100 demons?'

It was an exhausting thought.

'But I won't die like this! If I die then I have to take Alan with me!'

Ark's eyes flashed and he shot forward.

"Heh, is this the last desperate struggle? The Devil's Fang!"

Alan snorted and attacked. However, Ark's goal wasn't Alan. Ark used Dark Dance to avoid Alan's attack and plunged his sword into a demon before shouting.

"Demonic Seal!"

Kuwaaaaaaaah!

The body of the demon crumpled and was sucked into the sword. Originally Demonic Seal was a skill to seal the demon into an item. But this time the demon wasn't sealed in a common item. It was the legendary sword Shining Darkness! When Demonic Seal was used, the black aura strengthened and a message window appeared.

-Shining Darkness has been charged with demonic energy.

<Charged demons: 1>

\* A minimum of 10 demons is needed to use the Shining Darkness skill.

That's right. This was the method Ark came up with. Ark hadn't used Shining Darkness yet. He didn't know how powerful the unknown skill

was. However, this skill was an option attached to a legendary sword. Furthermore, the skill had to be charged with demons before it could be used. There was no doubt that it would exert a tremendous power. Of course, it wouldn't reverse the situation no matter how powerful the skill was. But couldn't it take care of Alan?

"You coward, are you running away?"

"Bah, it is a strategic retreat. Demonic Seal, Demonic Seal, Demonic Seal!"

Ark dodged Alan's attacks and sealed the demons into the sword. After a while, the message window he was waiting for finally appeared.

-Shining Darkness has been charged with demonic energy.

<Charged demons: 10>

\* Shining Darkness can be used.

"That's it!"

Ark confirmed the message and turned around while shouting. He brandished his sword and yelled. No, just as he was about to yell.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a tremendous roar and the crystal temple suddenly fluctuated uncontrollably. There was a flare of brightness like all the lights had been turned on in a dark room.

-The effects of Blackout have been destroyed by the sun's rays!

'The sun's rays?'

Ark hurriedly looked around. He grasped the situation a bit too late and his face darkened.

"U-unbelievable.....! O-outside!"

When the Blackout effect disappeared, he could see the mountains and plains. That's right. In the end, the Hell River had risen through all 60 floors. The shock just then was Silvana's earth collapsing. The Hell River and crystal temple shot dozens of metres out of the ground like a water fountain.

"Huck! T-the Hell River!"

"We failed after all?"

"Ah ah ah, it is the end of Nagaran!"

Confused voices could be heard as the Hell River rose. It was coming from JusticeMan and the allied forces who had escaped the secret dungeon. Ark heard their voices and also despaired. No, the moment he was about to give up!

"The Hell Stone!"

Someone cried out. And Ark's eyes caught the Hell Stone. The Hell Stone had fallen into a crack between a large number of black crystal fragments. It was impossible to find during the Blackout stage. But once the Blackout effect faded and the temple started shaking, all of the crystal fragments and the Hell Stone were swept to one side. Ark saw the Hell Stone with incredible timing and his hope was revived.

'Yes, now.....I might not be too late..... I can stop the Hell River!"

"Wormer!"

"The repairs are finished!"

Wormer yelled towards Ark. Ark's body then flew like an arrow towards the Hell Stone. However, one person had moved to the Hell Stone before Ark.

"Hate Aura!"

The person surrounded by a black aura and rushing forward at extravagant speed was Alan. Hate Aura increased Alan's movement

speed by 30%. Alan overtook Ark and reached the Hell Stone. Ark let out a distressed cry and swung his sword.

“Ah, no. Shining Darkness!”

Flash! Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

At the moment, the black aura surrounding Ark’s sword exploded. It was so utterly pitch black dark that nothing could be seen! The darkness shot out in front of it like a huge tsunami and swallowed everything. A chain explosion occurred and Alan was also swallowed up.

“Kuaaaaak!”

Alan screamed as he was caught in the explosion and blasted dozens of metres away. Shining Darkness was the knockdown technique of the legendary sword which dealt a critical hit and ate 40% of Alan’s health at once. That wasn’t all. The demons and Avengers caught in the explosion were torn to shreds and also flew away, causing a radiating pattern around Ark. The destructive power was enough that the Avengers and demons caught in the explosion turned to dust. A giant crater was created in the area where Shining Darkness was used. It was like a nuclear bomb had been dropped.

“T-this is.....”

Ark stuttered with a stunned look.

While he was astonished at the incredible power of Shining Darkness, the reason he was stunned was because the area where the Hell Stone was located had also been caught in the explosion. At that moment, the hundreds of people left in the temple looked on in unison.

Tuk, tuk, tuk, tuk.....

A black stone fell from the sky and rolled away. The Hell Stone! It had been caught in the blast and blown away. And.....

Snap!

Someone picked up the Hell Stone as it rolled to their feet. Ark, Shambala and the soldiers all stiffened as they saw the person.

“Jewel.....!”

A moan emerged from Ark’s mouth. That’s right. The person who picked up the Hell Stone was the magician Jewel. Hundreds of eyes looked at Jewel as he picked it up.

“Ugh! J-Jewel.....Hell Stone.....throw it outside the temple!”

Alan who was a piece of rag on the ground tried to get up while shouting. All of Ark’s hope disappeared. Everybody expected Jewel to obey Alan and throw away the Hell Stone. However, everybody watching the scene became stunned in the next moment.

“W-what is this.....?”

Jewel had thrown the Hell Stone towards Wormer at the Hell Altar. Everybody was surprised at Jewel’s rogue actions. Then the distinctive form of a bat appeared from Jewel’s hood.

“Kekekeke, the person who always settles a situation is me!”

“Curio!”

Ark exclaimed. Ark finally understood everything. During the chaos of Blackout covering the temple, Curio had used Blood-sucking on Jewel many times. In the end, he managed to successfully ‘confuse’ Jewel and hid in his hood. It was the reason why Jewel didn’t obey Alan’s command to attack Wormer. In fact, during the battle Ark had received a message stating that Curio had successfully used Confusion. However, he was battling with Alan and couldn’t check the name. Therefore he thought that a random Avenger had been confused. He hadn’t unexpected Curio’s action to be such a big influence.

“Wormer!”

Ark burst out.

“S-stop! Stop him!”

Alan’s cry rang out and the demons and Avengers rushed to the altar. But it was already too late to stop Wormer. Wormer placed the Hell Stone on the altar and pulled the switch.

Dduk.

All the noises around him suddenly disappeared. The Hell Altar shook and a lightning bolt struck the temple. The lightning bolt pierced through the temple and hit the Hell River. When it struck, the Hell River that was rising from the secret dungeon stopped moving. An earthquake simultaneously shook Silvana.

Jjajjajjang, jjajjajjang!

A splitting sound continuously rang from the secret dungeon. It was soon possible to know what the sound was. Clear ice was quickly covering the Hell River and coming upwards. The river spouting from the ground suddenly turned into ice pillars.

-The Hell River has been sealed.

“W-we did it. It is interrupted.....”

Ark muttered at the sight of the message in front of him. At that moment, the ice turned to sand and the crystal temple crashed to the ground.

“Huk! I-it is falling! Everybody prepare for impact!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The crystal temple plunged into the ground dozens of metres from the entrance to the secret dungeon. There was a huge shock and the crystal temple split. When the temple crashed, huge damage was applied to the users and demons. Most of the users barely survived while the demons died from the impact. Ark also had low health but he barely managed to survive. Then the demons and Avengers who survived around Ark unsteadily got up.



“Ugh, do you want to see this through to the end?”

Ark was unsteadily raising his voice when he heard it.

“The Hell River has been sealed. Attack and exterminate them!”

JusticeMan’s voice was heard from behind Ark. At the same time, tens of thousands of allied forces rushed into the temple.

That’s right. It was the allied forces who had been watching the situation from Silvana. There few remaining demons and Avengers inside the temple were no match.

“Dark Strike!”

Ark who received recovery magic also jumped back in the fray. Now that almost everything was cleared up, he wanted to handle Alan. But no matter how hard he looked, Ark couldn’t find Alan or Timosi. At that moment he heard Curio’s voice over his head.

“Master, those guys!”

And he looked where Curio was pointing.

“.....Alan!”

Curio was pointing towards Alan, Timosi and some Avenger members who were flying away on gargoyles. When the crystal temple was falling, those guys had quickly escaped into the sky using gargoyles.

“Shoot them down with magic and arrows!”

At JusticeMan’s command, the allied forces fired off magic and arrows. But Alan was already more than 100 metres away. Most of the magic and arrows failed to even hit them. Alan looked at the magic and arrows flying under his feet before flying away with the gargoyles.

“Damn.....!”

Ark cursed as he watched Alan. Then he sighed and turned away. At the moment, a loud cry shook his eardrums.

“Waaaaahhhh!”

“We did it! We protected Nagaran!”

“Hooray Nagaran’s allied forces! Hooray Dark Wolf!”

Silvana erupted with the loud cheers. But Ark didn’t hear the loud cheers. With all the tension and barely sleeping for the last 10 days, Ark just looked at the allied forces with dumb surprise and collapsed from exhaustion.

“Ark-nim!”

The allied forces flocked to the fallen Ark. The long battle to defend Nagaran had finally ended.

#### **Act 4: Swirl of Intrigue**

Thick pillars lined up in the corridor like a temple in ancient Rome. A huge stone room was located at the end of the corridor. The walls of the stone chamber were filled with carvings and had a black aura around them. They were carvings of deformed beasts that were normally seen in nightmares. A large number of people were suffering under the claws of the beasts. The torch flickered weirdly and made it seem like the carvings were alive.

Dukong, dukong, dukong!

A steady pounding sound was heard throughout the stone room. The pounding sound came from the object placed on the altar in the centre of the stone hut. A heart.....that’s right. It was the mysterious heart Alan had taken from the Hell River. With every swell and shrinking of the 10 metres huge heart, the black aura would become larger. And the black aura spread along the ground of the stone room like dry ice.

“It’s been hundreds of years.....wonderful.”

An old man wearing a hood murmured in a cheerful voice. And he stretched out his hand to touch the heart. Just as the wrinkled finger was about to touch the rising heart.....

“Maseutyu!”

A rough voice shook the stone chamber. The old man’s eyes became displeased. The old man looked at the heart before turning around slowly and taking off his hood. With the face covered in so many deep wrinkles that it was impossible to guess his age, Maseutyu was the archbishop of the Ankh church.

“.....You came?”

The person who approached was a man wearing black armour and covered in blood. It was Alan who had escaped from Silvana on the gargoyles. Alan glared at Maseutyu and declared sharply.

“I want an explanation.”

“Explanation? For what?”

Maseutyu asked.

“The quantum transmitter receiver!”

“What’s the problem?”

Maseutyu tilted his head to one side like he didn’t understand the words. Then Alan shouted angrily.

“If the receiver worked as planned then Nagaran would’ve been submerged by the Hell River now. But it didn’t work. Thanks to that, I was almost wiped out and the Hell River resealed. How can you explain this situation?”

“Did you try checking the quantum receiver?”

“Of course I checked it. It was broken.”

"I know that. That's why the receiver didn't work properly."

".....I want to know why it is broken."

Alan asked in a harsh voice. Once again, Alan had two reasons to invade Silvana. One was to obtain the heart inside the stone room from the Hell River. And the other reason was to submerge Nagaran with the Hell River. But it was impossible to achieve both goals at the same time. It was impossible to leave with the heart if he made the Hell River flood. Then he accidentally stumbled on the quantum transmitter at Pabiun Canyon and discovered a method to achieve both goals at once. It was possible to immediately move the heart with spatial movement. And Alan's plan to transfer the heart was a success. But it didn't work when Alan and the Avenger members tried to use it.

'Why didn't it catch the quantum receiver's frequency?'

Alan had been thinking that question the whole time. However, the reason was simple once he reached this place.

The quantum receiver placed here had been destroyed.

"The expedition armies don't know about this place yet. There were no signs of a surprise attack when I got here. Yet why is the quantum receiver broken? Besides, it worked properly when it had to transmit the heart."

Alan couldn't accept the situation. And there was something else he couldn't understand.

"Furthermore, I was contacted by the dead Avenger members before I got here....."

Alan opened his mouth again. Maseutyu who had been listening silently finally laughed and muttered.

".....I was the one who destroyed the quantum receiver."

"W-what?"

Alan flinched and closed his mouth. Maseutyu was the one who broke the receiver? What was he saying? Alan looked at him with a foolish look.

“Why would you do that?”

“Calm down.”

“Calm down? You’re telling me to calm down?”

“There is a reason for it.”

Maseutyu waved his hands.

“Reason? You have a reason?”

“Yes.”

Maseutyu answered in a light tone. He slowly moved around the heart and said.

“It isn’t necessary to explain but this heart is the most important object. It isn’t an exaggeration to say that all of our plans were for finding this object. The value of destroying Nagaran is nothing compared to the heart. And the person who found this heart is the Ruin Knight. Your achievement really deserves admiration.”

“Then why did you do something.....?”

“Well, well! Just wait a bit more. The reason you could transmit the heart here is because of the quantum transmitter. If you also took advantage of the transmitter then you could come here safely. But what next?”

“Next?”

“If those guys got a hold on the quantum transmitter then wouldn’t they obtain the frequency to this place?”

Maseutyu shook his head.

"It is better not to risk it. If they got the quantum transmitter then wouldn't they be able to move straight to this place? Of course, those guys would die once they reach here but the concern is that they might tell the expedition forces. There are also foreigners who can track mana so they could also discover this place."

Alan frowned as he thought about Maseutyu's explanation. If he thought about it like that then Maseutyu's action was understandable. While the MG had disappeared after Ark used the quantum transmitter, Ark had Wormer. There was no guarantee that Wormer couldn't develop another magic charger. If Ark came here with the quantum transmitter then the expedition army would know about this location. Therefore Maseutyu reduced the risk by destroying the receiver. Alan understood. But just because he understood didn't mean the problem was solved.

"Then shouldn't you have explained it to me before?"

"I couldn't say it."

"You couldn't?"

"In fact, I had another reason to break the receiver."

"Another reason?"

"Now....."

Maseutyu licked his lips and narrowed his eyes.

"Your help has become unnecessary. No, that's not it. To be exact, you can only help one last time. You guy.....the immortal lives of the foreigners.....that is needed. It is the last ingredient to resurrect the Dark Lord."

"Our lives.....?"

Alan felt an ominous feeling.

-Grrrrrrrr.

An eerie roar echoed from behind his back. At the same time, glossy red pupils appeared all around him. The wall carvings.....the deformed beasts on the carvings all opened their eyes simultaneously. And they rose and crawled off the wall. The room instantly filled with the thousands of animals and a nasty fish smell. Alan had seen the wall carvings many times but he never thought they were alive. The atmosphere around them were different from the demons controlled by Alan. The thousands of eyes that were thirsty for blood all focused on Alan.

"T-this is.....!"

Confusion appeared on Alan's face. Then Maseutyu bowed gracefully and said.

"Ruin Knight, we've spent a lot of time together. But our relationship will end here."

"Y-you....then everything you said so far....."

"It was true. You will rise to the ultimate seat in this world. As the Dark Lord's flesh and blood. Forever....."

"This bastard!"

Alan growled and took out his sword. The beasts drooled and simultaneously ran up to Alan.

*-Kuwwaaaaaaaaah!*

"D-damn! The Devil's Fang!"

Alan roared with fury and twisted his sword. But Alan's roar became a scream in the next moment. Alan's attacks only did 1% damage to the wave of beasts. It meant they were elite monsters. Thousands of elite creatures!

"Ugh, rampaging spirits!"

In the end, Alan turned away from Maseutyu. He used the skill which increased his movement speed and ran away. This place was the hidden base of the demons. And those demons were Alan's subordinates. Now that he was betrayed by Maseutyu, the demons didn't listen to Alan anymore. It was the lair of the demons trying to sacrifice Alan to restore the Dark Lord.

'No. I can't die in a place like his!'

*-Kuwaaaaaaaaaah!*

He did his best to run away but the beasts caught up with tremendous speed and swung their claws. Alan's health was sucked out with every attack.

"Ugh, boundaries of the dead! Rampaging spirits!"

Alan rolled on the ground and persistently fired his skills while running away. And he finally reached the corridor near the entrance.

'The Avenger members are waiting outside this time so if I join them I can escape. It isn't too late. Maseutyu.....I dare him to come out! I'll do whatever it takes to make him pay!'

Alan pledged when he tried to escape the temple. Suddenly a red shape quickly ran from behind a pillar towards the entrance.

"Heok! What, what the?"

Alan swung his sword reflexively. But the shadow moved like a snake and hit Alan.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, jjejejejeok!

Something ripped from inside his body and there was a ringing sound. The message window appeared when the noise finished.

-You have been hit by a 'Chakra Wave.'



<You have received the direct impact of 'Chakra Wave' inside your body.

Defense is ignored and you have received 800 damage. The shock wave also ruined the balance of mana inside your body and you have lost 1000 mana. Thanks to the severe bruising, your attack speed and movement speed is reduced by 10% for 5 minutes.

Your body is also rigid and you will be unable to move for 3 seconds>

'Chakra wave!'

Alan vomited blood and looked around anxiously. Alan knew of only one person who could use Chakra wave.

"The Red Man!"

That's right. The person who hit Alan had red hair while wearing a white mask. Alan was in a critical condition from the beasts' attacks and now the Red Man. Alan looked at the Red Man who appeared and shouted.

"Are you and Maseutyu working together?"

The Red Man just drew the two swords hanging on his waist instead of answering. Then a flash headed towards Alan who was rigid for 3 seconds. But the image that appeared in Alan's eyes wasn't the Red Man. An Asura with a frightening face attacked him with dozens of swords. The sword of light that the Asura wielded passed through Alan.....

Chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa chwa!

Alan lost 5% health and he had almost no more left as his blood drained out.

"You, you bastard.....!"

Alan stared at the Red Man with red eyes. The form of the Red Man was reflected in his eyes.....Alan vowed revenge but he had no more opportunity to achieve it. The reason was a message that surfaced in front of Alan.

-A special item has been triggered.

All of the character's data has been absorbed by the 'Token of Darkness.' All the data absorbed by the Token of Darkness has been deleted from New World.

'Oh my god, the thing the Avenger talked about.....!'

Alan felt his heart fall. It had what Alan had previously tried to ask Maseutyu. When Alan had escaped from Silvana to come here, the Avenger members who did had called him. The contents were what Alan witnessed in the information window just now.

"Alan-nim, something is strange!"

"When we died, we received the message that our character data was being sucked in by the necklace!"

"What on earth is going on?"

The Avenger members had seen the same message as Alan when they died. And when the Avenger members logged back into New World, there appeared in a new character creation screen. It meant all of their character data had been completely deleted from New World's server.

'Did Global Exos take some action against us?'

Alan had thought this at first. Alan knew that this situation was a threat to Global Exos. If it was possible then Global Exos would've immediately deleted their characters and seized their accounts. But Alan was aware that Global Exos had lost control of New World. Alan had participated in the plan because he knew that Global Exos couldn't take action to suspend him. Then he could only think of one reason for his

data being sucked into the necklace. Alan looked at the necklace pulsing on his chest.

-Token of Darkness (Rare)

Item Type: Necklace

Durability: 60/60

Weight: 10

User Restrictions: Level 300 more, chaotic value of more than 300.

The ancient power of darkness is lodged in this necklace. This necklace contains a wicked magic that was created by the forces of darkness a long time ago. The person who wears this necklace will receive the effect of Demonic Sphere of Influence. However, only a corrupted person can wear this necklace.

<Option: When entering the Demonic Sphere of Influence, an advantage equal to the demons are applied>

<Special Option: Unidentified>

This was the necklace that the Red Man gave Alan and the Avenger members before they left for Silvana. It was an artifact which gave chaotic users a bonus equal to the demonic monsters when they entered the Demonic Sphere of Influence. That's right. Like Ark guessed in the secret dungeon, this was the artifact which increased their abilities beyond their level. But other secrets were hidden in the artifact. When the wearer died, it absorbed the data and sent it somewhere else! That was the unidentified special option of the 'Token of Darkness.'

'This is ridiculous! An item which erases the information of the character!'

It was incomprehensible. But Alan encountered it so he couldn't deny its existence. At the same time, numerous thoughts ran through Alan's head.

‘This had been planned from the very beginning. Maseutyu said.....the immortal life of the users.....it means the users’ data. It is a sacrifice to resurrect the Dark Lord..... What is this? And the person trying to restore the Dark Lord.....’

Alan looked at the Red Man with confused eyes. At the same time, his body died and collapsed towards the Red Man.

Then Alan confirmed something about the Red Man as he fell. Perhaps Alan’s sword that he swung when hit by Chakra Wave hadn’t missed. In New World, when a equipment’s durability ended then it would disappear. Alan’s eyes concentrated on the mask as he fell. The moment he checked the mask, surprise and disbelief entered his eyes. The face of the Red Man hidden behind the mask.....

‘T-this.....huck! Ah ah ah, wahhhhh!’

Alan suddenly felt a tremendous pain in his head. The pain felt like his head was exploding. It wasn’t pain from New World. His real self that was lying down in the unit in reality was in pain. Alan screamed from the pain. The next moment, a weird phenomenon occurred to Alan’s body. A deep black lump rose from the stone room and flew towards his body. Maseutyu also walked out from the stone room.

“Huhuhu, the Ruin Knight has absorbed the heart.”

Maseutyu looked at Alan’s dead body before saying towards the Red Man.

“The necessary souls have already been collected.”

“.....Let’s move to the location.”

“Yes. But what about those people shivering outside?”

“.....Kill them.”

The Red Man replied in a low voice.

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“Don’t think of them as ordinary users. Think of them as terrorists.”

A middle age leaning next to the door said in a low voice. The 10 people in a circle around the door nodded with tense expressions. The foreigners with blond hair and a south-east Asian origin had badges engraved with G·A·S·P attached to their chest. G·A·S·P.....it stood for Global Exos Special Security Personnel. That’s right. These were the special security agents that Global Exos had dispatched. And they were currently surrounded a villa in the suburbs of Hong Kong.

“Everybody move to their assigned positions.

The members scattered from the leader’s order. It resembled a scene of FBIs fighting against terrorists in a movie or drama. Although they weren’t holding real pistols, they had gas guns in their hands. They were blocking the villa because of an order that came from the headquarters in Korea. They wanted to seal off the Hong Kong villa 1134-46 in order to meet a user playing New World. The relevant legal procedures had already been handled between headquarters and the Hong Kong police.

The reason for the order was related to a top secret project that headquarters was working on. It was a project that Kim Gwon-tae had rallied a large number of hackers to work on. The project started after Hyun-woo told them that Alan was working with the demons. However, by that time Alan had already escaped to Hong Kong. Kim Gwon-tae had rallied the programmers to hack the Hong Kong servers so they could find Alan’s residence. And they finally succeeded in the backtracking and discovered Alan’s residence. But the villa that the special security agents sealed wasn’t Alan’s residence. It was because of Kim Gwon-tae’s opinion.

“Okay. Mobilize the security staff in Hong King to arrest Alan!”

When Ha Myung-woo first received Kim Gwon-tae’s report, he immediately mobilized the troops. Kim Gwon-tae shook his head and explained.

"No, just wait."

"What does that mean? Don't you know the current situation in New World? We have to arrest him and appease our customers. The first thing to do is stop those guys!"

"Don't you think it would become a problem if people discover that we hired hackers to hack our own servers?"

"Then what?"

Ha Myung-woo wrinkled his forehead as he frowned. Kim Kwon-tae tapped a thick paper file with his finger and explained.

"After we discovered Alan's server tracks, we traced his movements. As expected, Alan is deeply involved with this event. But he is not the mastermind."

"He's not? Then.....?"

"Yes. Using Alan's circuit, we tapped all of the Avenger members and the transcripts of the NPCs he talked to. As a result, we're certain that the Red Man is the mastermind."

"Didn't we expect that? But what does this have to do with holding back on punishing Alan?"

"If we want to fry a large fish then it is better to leave the small fish as bait."

Ha Myung-woo's eyes narrowed at Kim Gwon-tae's answer.

"You're saying.....there is a way to catch the larger fish?"

"Didn't I tell you from the beginning?"

Kim Gwon-tae pointed to the office infested with hackers.

“We’ve hacked into the Hong Kong circuits and are keeping track of Alan. So we can intercept all data exchanged with the main server. That doesn’t just mean that we can see information only related to Alan.”

That’s right. Whenever a user took some action in the game, the commands would be sent to the main server. For example, if Alan swung his sword when fighting an enemy then a command would be sent to the main server telling it that Alan swung the sword. But if the enemy attacked Alan then the main server would communicate that action to Alan. In other words, all actions applied to Alan within the game relied information exchange with the main server. If they hacked the circuit where the information was exchanged then they could discover all users, items and NPCs that Alan got in contact with. That’s why there were 100 hackers analyzing the data day and night.....

Anyway, Kim Gwon-tae and the 100 hackers discovered all of the information exchanged with the main server in a few days. That’s why they were convinced that the Red Man was the main person in charge of this event.

“Alan made contact with the Red Man last time.”

Kim Gwon-tae said with sharp eyes.

“We’ve figured out Alan’s residence so we no longer need to track him. So he rallied all the hackers and chased the Red Man’s circuit that had got in contact with Alan’s. There were a few minor problems but they were professionals.....eventually they found the place he was connecting from.

“Where is it?”

“That fellow is also in Hong Kong.”

“Hong Kong? Then that is why Alan went to Hong Kong in the first place.....”

“He must’ve made contact with the Red Man then.”

“Then you’ve decided not to catch Alan?”

“If they’ve made contact then the Red Man will probably notice if we grab Alan. Then the Red Man will cut the connection loop with Alan and move behind even more sophisticated firewalls. We know his plan is to shake Global Exos. Then he has that kind of ability. If that guy notices out movements then it will be difficult to find his trail again.”

Just like Hyun-woo and the rehabilitation members, Kim Gwon-tae and Ha Myung-woo had determined that the Red Man’s purpose was to either cheat, blackmail or manipulate the stock prices in order to raise huge revenues. If that happened then hundreds or thousands of billions of won would be moved. Then this simply wasn’t an event in the game anymore.

It was an act of global terrorism aimed at a huge business. It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that the Red Man was a terrorist. A large organization would be moving behind the scene. And they would’ve had contingencies for every conceivable situation. Kim Gwon-tae was sure that one of those precautions involved Alan.

“The Red Man must have some sort of safety device for Alan. He would probably hide if Alan was exposed.”

“Then we will leave Alan alone until we grab the Red Man?”

“That is the only way to catch the Red Man.”

“How much time is needed to track the Red Man’s circuit?”

“I’ve already learned Alan’s residence so I don’t need to backtrack his line anymore. If all the hackers only concentrate on the Red Man’s circuit then we can find his residence in a few days.”

“Understood. Hurry!”

So they moved on to tracing the Red Man’s circuit. After two days of staying up all night and nosebleeds, the hackers were finally able to figure out where the Red Man connected from. Ha Myung-woo immediately contacted the Hong Kong branch and dispatched security



personnel to the Red Man and Alan's hiding places. Currently the security agents were surrounding the Red Man's residence. Of course, they were only the security staff of a private company. They didn't have any right to search or arrest the culprit. However, Global Exos had poured tremendous funds into this project. Therefore the security agents were accompanied by the Hong Kong police, but they just watched with arms folded.

"Rush in!"

The assault crew kicked the door and rushed into the villa. And they were followed by 10 more agents.

"They're not on the 1st floor!"

"Wait on the 1st floor for 1 minute. Enter the 2nd floor in 2 minutes!"

The security agents move quickly like a real SWAT team. They sealed each corridor and climbed to the 2nd floor while quickly searching all rooms.

"I found it. The unit for New World. But....."

After a while, the voice of a security agent stuttered with confusion. Confusion also spread over the leader's face after he entered the room.

Wiiiiing, wiiiiing.

Heat and mechanical sounds flowed from the room. The unit was inside the room just like the agent said. And the unit was moving like it was connected to the game. But the user couldn't be seen. Instead of a user, hundreds of cables were stripped and connected to a computer in the corner of the room? A huge circuit? The computer was connected to the unit.

"W-what is this?"

The leader looked at the other members with an astonished look. Then a system management staff connected a laptop to the machine. They typed into their keyboard for a while before saying in a freaked out voice.

“It is connected to the unit.....this computer.....oh my god, it is a giant auto program.”

“Auto program?”

“The user isn’t moving directly but the program is sending orders telling the character how to move.”

“What does that mean? Is this 2010? Why are they using an auto program? And how much terabytes would the auto program need to be able to operate a character in New World? Wouldn’t it be easier for the user to move directly in New World?”

“It is unbelievable even though I am seeing it with my own eyes.”

The system staff muttered while sweating.

“This computer changes the data to brain waves and transmits it to the unit. For a program like this, millions of terabytes is used to respond to any situation. The unit has also been perfectly remodelled. An ordinary user couldn’t do this. They have to understand New World..... then.....”

“Then?”

The leader asked in an anxious voice. The staff suddenly shouted in a stricken voice.

“This computer’s hard disk is empty!”

“What? Didn’t you say it had millions of terabytes just before?”

“That is certain. This computer’s hard disk had millions of terabytes worth of information. But it’s not there now. And the data.....has all been transferred to New World’s main server.

“What nonsense is this? The data was sent to New World’s main server through a mere unit? That isn’t possible!”

“Yes. It’s not possible. It is impossible.....”

The server management agent stuttered with perplexity. That’s right. It was impossible to move new data to New World’s main server. Even Global Exos had lost control of the main server and couldn’t add new information to it. Yet a mere unit had managed to forcibly transmit information to the main server? An auto program had managed something that thousands of hackers couldn’t do? It was complete nonsense. But if it was really possible.....And this auto program was the data of the Red Man.....

Didn’t that mean the Red Man had become an NPC in New World? The Red Man created by the auto program have evolved into a life form in New World! Even if they smashed the computer or caught the person who created the auto program, it was impossible to stop the Red Man.

“What on earth? Gather the computer and unit and contact headquarters immediately!”

The leader commanded. Then one of the crew members came in and shouted.

“Captain-nim, the Bravo Team has entered the office that Alan rented. Then.....”

“Then?” What is it? Was Alan not there?”

“No, that is.....”

The member hesitated before finally replying.

“Alan was connected to the unit. But he was already in a brain-dead condition when we secured him.”

“Brain-dead condition?”

"Yes, one of the staff investigated and said it was likely due to the shock caused by a backflow of data."

The leader's face darkened at the report.

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"What is he doing?"

Timosi muttered. After escaping from Silvana, Timosi and 30 Avenger members were gathered in front of a temple.

Alan had gone inside the temple to receive an explanation from Maseutyu about the broken receiving and they were waiting for him. However, it had already been more than 10 minutes and Alan hadn't returned. One of the Avenger members looked at the temple with a bored look.

"What are they talking about?"

"How long do we have to wait?"

Timosi shot her bow with an angry expression and declared sharply.

"Damn, if they don't give us a good reason then I won't leave Maseutyu and the Red Man alone!"

"I wonder what the reason will be."

The Avenger member replied to Timosi. Timosi was glaring at the temple when she suddenly blinked. A small object was flying from the entrance of the temple.

"Eh? What is that? Hawk's Eye!"

Timosi immediately used Hawk's Eye. The scenery zoomed in many times like she was looking through a telescope. Timosi examined the object with Hawk's Eye and laughed.

“Hohoho, what the? Alan’s eyeball? Doesn’t he know that I can’t stand seeing it? Anyway, it can’t be helped. It belongs to Alan so isn’t it quite cute?”

The Avenger members made expressions that said ‘no way’ after hearing Timosi’s words. Timosi was different from the other Avenger members. Most of them were chaotic users that joined after being scouted by Andel. However, Timosi had seen Alan on TV and voluntarily joined the Avenger guild. It was all so that she could ogle Alan night and day.

‘That woman seems partial to rich men.’

That was Timosi’s reputation among the Avenger members. Even so, there was a reason Alan and the Avenger members didn’t mess with her. Although Timosi was a crazy woman with a few screws loose, her skills and level made her the strongest user in the Avenger guild.

“Hohoho, is he trying to record me?”

Timosi immediately took out a mirror after seeing Alan’s eyeball. She also pulled out a cosmetics set and applied it. At that moment, the eyeball suddenly fell to the ground.

“Eh, it fell!”

“Is it because it saw Timosi’s shocking makeup?”

“Well.....it certainly is fearful when looking at it in the evening.....”

“What? Do you want to fight?”

Timosi huffed and angrily hit the Avenger members for their words. But then the eyeball which fell to the ground started rotting? The Avenger members exchanging jokes flinched and shut their mouths. Alan’s eyeball was rotting. There were only two reasons for that. One was that Timosi’s painted face was horrible enough to make it rot, or more likely it meant that the person who used Vampire’s Eye was dead. But how could Alan die at the secret base of the demons? Timosi and the Avenger

members hurriedly ran to the rotting eyeball. Although it was rotting, the memory crystal lodged in it was still fine.

“What the hell happened in the temple?”

That information would be left in the memory crystal driven into Alan’s eyeball. No, clearly Alan had sent the eyeball to them to inform the Avenger members of something important. Timosi had that idea and hurriedly played the memory crystal. When the crystal was used, an image began to form in the sky.

“What, what the? T-this is.....!”

Timosi and the Avengers burst out as they watched the video. The memory crystal played from the moment Alan entered the temple to when he tried to escape. In other words, it showed the words Alan exchanged with Maseutyu and when he was chased by the beasts. That’s right. Alan had sent the eyeball to the Avenger members for help when he was being chased by the beasts. And it fell to the ground when the Red Man dealt the final blow near the entrance to the temple. While the scene of the Red Man killing him wasn’t recorded, the rotted eyeball clearly meant that Alan was dead. Timosi grinded her teeth together after the video ended.

“Maseutyu dared do that to Alan.....!”

“Timosi-nim!”

An Avenger cried out next to her. Timosi raised her head after hearing the panicked noise.

*-Kuwwaaaah!*

A large number of beasts were exiting the temple. They were the beasts that attacked Alan. Even people with an IQ in the single digits would be able to tell why the monsters were coming. It was to kill Timosi and the Avenger members like they did Alan!

Paduduk!

The sound of Timosi's tooth breaking was heard. She wanted to kill those beasts and roast their flesh. But according to the information Alan left behind, all of the beasts were elite monsters. No, even if they weren't elite monsters it was impossible for 30 Avengers to fight against thousands of monsters. When considering the power inside the demons' lair, it was almost impossible to escape. If they fought they would be 100% wiped out. Then there was no reason to think too much.

"Damn, Matanyi Shooter no. 3, Devil's Stabbing Arrow!"

Timosi turned and shot dozens of arrows. The movements of the rushing beasts became a little dull.

"Let's get out of here for the moment! Maintain formation and retreat!"

*-Kuwwaaaah!*

Timosi's voice was soon buried by the roars of the beasts.

## **Act 5: Save Nagaran's Restoration Funds**

It had taken 10 days to prevent Alan's plan. He had invested a tremendous amount of time, money and effort into Silvana.

Hyun-woo disappeared into his room and barely slept as he tried to save Silvana. Therefore Hyun-woo only slept an average of two hours for 10 days. All his tension was released after the Hell River was sealed and he slept like the dead. But his sleep wasn't comfortable.

"Waaaaahhhhh!"

"Fight. Do whatever it takes to save Nagaran!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The intense battle situations which caused him a lot of stress replayed over and over in Hyun-woo's head while he was sleeping. Screams and the sound of metal clashing had been ringing in his ears nonstop for the last 10 days. How long did he sleep?

Diririri, diririri.

He finally stirred as the shouts changed to a familiar ringing sound. Hyun-woo who was wandering the land of dreams heard the sound of the phone ringing.

"Ohhhh, what bastard.....? I don't know, I don't know. I don't care even if the world is going to be destroyed today!"

Hyun-woo who had fallen asleep within the unit angrily snapped. The phone disconnected after a short time. But the moment Hyun-woo tried to sleep again, the phone once again began to noisily ring.

"Dammit!"

Eventually Hyun-woo cursed and got up. And he picked up the phone.

"Oh, Hyun-woo?"

"Jjak-tung hyung?"

"Yes, it's me."

"Why do you keep on calling in the morning?"

"What are you saying? This is the first time..... Were you sleeping?"

"..... I was sleeping. Hyung-nim woke me up before. I'm going to hang up and go back to sleep."

Hyun-woo declared with a 120% petulant voice. Then Jjak-tung said.

"You can sleep later. The internet has been overturned!"

"Why should I care that the internet has been overturned?"

"Of course you should care! You are the culprit."

"What are you saying out of nowhere? What did I do?"

"There's no need to worry. Just connect to the internet immediately and search for the name Ark. Then you'll know."

Hyun-woo frowned and scratched his head after hearing Jjak-tung's words. Hyun-woo had just woken up and he was still tired so he couldn't understand what Jjak-tung was saying. But something must've happened judging from Jjak-tung's excitement. Hyun-woo turned on his computer and accessed the internet. And he



typed in 'Ark' in the search engine. Hyun-woo looked at his monitor with an astonished expression before stuttering.

"W-what is this?"

"Are you wondering what is going on? Everybody is talking about you!"

"Oh my god....."

Hyun-woo moaned as he finally realized the situation. Hyun-woo was shocked by the contents of his computer screen. There were 14,680 results when he searched for 'Ark'. The hero who saved Nagaran from 100,000 demons! Shortly after the battle of Nagaran finished, Hyun-woo quickly became famous. Previously Hyun-woo had used a different name when doing anything on a large scale. Yet the number of Nagaran's allied forces who participated in the battle was 60,000. In other words, 60,000 users had entered the battle with Hyun-woo and the 60,000 started talking about their experiences. And the story became a little.....no, a huge exaggeration.

*-.....Ark directly commanded the troops and stopped the demons' attacks. In fact, more than half the rumours about Ark had been inflated. It was to the extent that it made him feel lacking. Ark-nim treated the demons lightly and always fearlessly plunged behind enemy lines.....*

(Fact: It was to pick up the loot that Radun couldn't.)

*-..... Ark-nim grasped my hand and said. 'If we give up here then we're just soldiers. If we don't give up then we're heroes.' After listening to his words, an incredible power rose in my body.....*

(Fact: don't be mistaken. The power was just the effect from Nursing.)

*-.....We advanced all the way to Silvana but I almost gave up after hearing that they had already invaded deep into the secret dungeon. But Ark-nim carried out a complex operation using his summons and managed to transport us to the 60th floor of the secret dungeon. I had goose bumps after listening to the explanation of the operation. And managing to stop 10,000 troops with just 2,000.....*

(This was true but the description of the battle made it seem like a hero movie.)

.....Anyway, Hyun-woo was a hero on the internet. In fact, if it was just this level then it would've been good. Hyun-woo's face turned red as there were a few sentences he couldn't bear to read at all. There were thousands of different types of posts flying around the internet. Ark's fighting is so intense that one slap on the cheek from him would be enough to slap the life back in someone, his strategy is so good that it would pull the moustache of Zhuge Liang, he is willing to risk his life for his colleagues, etc.....

“What on earth? This Ark?”

Hyun-woo asked as he read the posts.

“Hehehe, I don’t understand either. Anyway, you’re a star! A star!”

Jjak-tung giggled and said. He fell asleep completely normally and when he woke up, he was a ‘star’. It was only 11 a.m. when he checked the clock. Hyun-woo had sealed the Hell River at 3 a.m. so it was 7 hours since he passed out. 14,680 posts had been published during that 7 hours. He couldn’t imagine how many more posts would appear. When it was to this extent, there were no users in New World who wouldn’t know Ark’s name. Just like in the past, people also knew the name of famous pro Starcraft gamers.

‘Fuck!’

That was the first word that surfaced in Hyun-woo’s mind. Once again, Hyun-woo didn’t like drawing the attention of so many people. There were a number of reasons but the biggest one was that he would keep on being interrupted in the game. If he was famous then a lot of eyes and ears would concentrate on him. Then a lot of people would approach him in the game and waste his time. It would be a huge inconvenience for Hyun-woo. If that happened then it would be difficult to engage in business comfortable like he was now. If Hyun-woo slipped even just a little bit then it would become gossip on the internet. But was that all? He would soon become the target of jealousy and envy. While the impact of the Nagaran battle was huge right now and Hyun-woo was treated as a hero, there was no guarantee how long that would last. And people would start criticizing the hero for various actions taken. Didn’t Alan also walk that that dismal road?

‘It is best to be inconspicuous.’

That was Hyun-woo’s ideal game style. It was why Hyun-woo always broadcasted videos as Dark Wolf. But this time Dark Wolf wasn’t the one who saved Silvana. He had revealed to the 60,000 allied forces that Silvana’s Lord and Dark Wolf was the same person so Ark’s existence was revealed to the world.

‘Damn, I was too worried about Silvana that I didn’t pay any attention to this part.’

However, there was no way to stop it from happening. If he didn’t want to be slandered on the internet then he would have to act as a ‘good guy’ from now on. If he made even the smallest mistake then he might be labelled as a public enemy. And become a public enemy would make it difficult to play the game normally. He had to avoid that situation at all costs! Once again, Hyun-woo earned a considerable amount of his livelihood from New World.

'I should've thought about this part before I gathered the Nagaran allied forces!'

Hyun-woo belatedly regretted his actions.

Diririri, diririri.

The phone rang again as soon as Jjak-tung hung up. The voice of a middle aged man was heard when he picked up the phone.

"Ark-nim, you've finally picked up."

"Who.....?"

"I am the PD of the game exclusive news, Lee Yun-gyu!"

Hyun-woo looked doubtful as he heard the words. If it was the PD of the game exclusive news then of course he knew him.

After defending Lancel village against Jewel's group, he had signed an exclusive contract with him for Hyun-woo's videos. Hyun-woo was confused because the contract had already ended a while ago after sending 8 videos.

"I called you because I wanted to renegotiate the contract."

"Renegotiate?"

"Yes, the edited videos that Ark-nim sent to the game exclusive news has been received quite well. Thanks to a lot of requests, the broadcasting station has decided to organize a 'Dark Wolf's Adventures season 2'."

"Dark Wolf Adventures season 2?"

Hyun-woo's eyes shone at Lee Yun-gyu's words. He meant there was another chance for Hyun-woo to sell his videos to the broadcasting station? Hyun-woo's previous contract gave him a copyright fee of 2.5 million won. In the past two months, he had secured a fixed income of 25 million won for 10 videos. With the name Ark now well known, he had been worrying about how to earn money in the future. But now the station called asking to renew the contract? His mind was still dull and sleepy. Yet Hyun-woo had to organize his thoughts as soon as he woke up.

"The reaction to the previous videos was quite good so I will give a copyright fee of 3 million won per video this time. The video of Nagaran's defense will also have a special broadcast. The copyright fee for that video will be a separate 10 million won. Global Exos has already assented so we just need Ark-nim's agreement for the contract."

Lee Yun-gyu hurriedly said. Hyun-woo's mouth dropped open. 3 million won for 10 videos would be 30 million won!

And the video of Nagaran's defense was 10 million won! If he simply sent in videos then he could earn 40 million won in two months.

'What kind of luck is this?'

Hyun-woo was about to give the OK sign without thinking. Then Hyun-woo realized that something was strange.

'We're the ratings of 'Dark Wolf's Adventures' really that good?'

Hyun-woo never heard those words during the two months it was broadcasted. To be exact, Dark Wolf's Adventure was like a bungle for the game exclusive news. The game exclusive news had spent 2 weeks collected and putting together the videos Hyun-woo sent. But by the time it was broadcasted, the Demonic War had begun. So the interest of the audience was concentrated on the demonic war. Of course, Hyun-woo also entered the Demonic War but there were thousands of videos about it so Hyun-woo's videos weren't that interesting. There was only a surge in ratings when Hyun-woo released the video related to information about the Hell River from Shangri-La.

'Yet they're planning season 2 and will even give an extra 500,000 won as a copyright fee?'

After thinking about it, questions would naturally rise. The broadcasting station wouldn't do that without a good reason.

'Something is fishy.....?'

Hyun-woo was immersed in his thoughts until the image of the computer screen floated in his head. He had gained 14,680 posts in just 7 hours!

'Yes, that's what it is.'

Hyun-woo was beginning to wake up and started to understand the circumstances. That's right. He didn't know what would happen later but Ark's fame in New World was currently at its peak! Thanks to 60,000 people spreading the words on the internet, there wouldn't be anyone in New World who didn't know Ark's name. And the place that would be most responsive to that interest is the broadcasting station! Hyun-woo started to understand why the broadcasting station was offering a higher copyright fee. Of course, there were 60,000 people who entered the battle to defend Nagaran. There would also be a lot of related videos. But Hyun-woo was the commander of the battlefield so his videos would naturally be different.

The audience rating would explode even if there was only one advertisement stating that 'Ark took the video directly.' That's why the station wanted to produce Dark Wolf's Adventures season 2.

'That's right. Then the phone that rang before Jjak-tung hyung.....'

The broadcasting station must've been the one calling. They were calling without any breaks to prevent other broadcasting stations from reaching him first. Hyun-woo completely woke up and thoughts began to turn over in his head.

'Then that changes things.'

That's right. If the broadcasting station were desperate to buy the video from Hyun-woo then the situation would change by 180 degrees. There was no reason for Hyun-woo to contract with the game exclusive news.

'But won't I make a lot of profit if I contract with the game exclusive news?'

There was a reason Hyun-woo should contract with the game exclusive news. The game exclusive news was known as the broadcasting program that supported Dark Wolf completely. If Hyun-woo became a hero and then suddenly went to another broadcasting station then the audience would treat him coldly. That was why the game exclusive news impatiently tried to call him. It was in order to defend the image of the station and prevent other stations from getting their hands on the videos. Hyun-woo was the valuable thing. Then it would be easy to maximize his profits. This chance might never come again. If the users' admiration changed to jealousy then they might not watch Hyun-woo's videos that were being broadcasted. Then it was better to raise it as much as possible while he could!

"Let's see? The offer is appreciated but I'm quite busy these days so it is hard to give a definite answer."

Hyun-woo tried a little fishing (?).

"Have you already been contacted by another broadcasting station?"

"Huh? No, t-that's not....."

Hyun-woo deliberately stuttered. Lee Yun-gyu immediately grabbed the bait.

"I understand. Can you wait a moment without hanging up?"

Lee Yun-gyu put the phone on standby and disappeared somewhere. After being on hold for 3~4 minutes, he once again heard Lee Yun-gyu's voice.

"I just consulted with the broadcasting station chief. We will pay 15 million won for the Nagaran defense video. And Dark Wolf's Adventures season 2 will be a 10 part video, each 10 minutes long. We will pay 4 million won for each video. No other broadcasting station will offer a higher price. How about it?"

Hyun-woo felt his heart jump after hearing Lee Yun-gyu's words.

'1 video for 15 million won and 10 x 4 million is 40 million won. That is a total of 55 million won!'

The first amount that the game exclusive news offered was 40 million won. If he hadn't received Jjak-tung's call first then he wouldn't have realized the situation and would've lost 15 million won.

'What? I might've settled for 40 million won?'

He felt furious just thinking about it. And this was a long-awaited change to raise the price a bit more. But Hyun-woo soon shook his head. It was clear that Lee Yun-gyu already had a grasp on how much the other broadcasting stations would offer. Then 55 million won was the highest amount the game exclusive news would give. When taken into account the other broadcasting stations, the game exclusive news offered the highest copyright fees of all the stations. If he became even greedier and refused the price for the video then he might have to accept a lesser price from other broadcasting stations. When engaging in business, he had to know when to push and when to back off.

"I understand. I'll accept that price. Do I have to go to the broadcasting station?"

"The recorded contents of this call will be the contract agreement for now. You can come to the broadcasting station whenever it is convenient to sign the written contract."

"Yes."

Hyun-woo calmly hung up the call while inwardly he was jumping with excitement.

'Having my fame soar isn't that bad. No, in the meantime I have only been thinking that it wasn't good. If I'm the focus of the players then it wouldn't be as easy to trade as before. But there is also a way to trade using my fame.'

Hyun-woo looked at this situation in a new light after talking to the game exclusive news. Therefore he woke up and connected to New World with an excited feeling.

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“Hah.....”

A sigh naturally emerged from Ark’s mouth. Ark was the hero who organized an unprecedented scale of allied forces and defeated 100,000 demons!

Thanks to his accomplishments in New World, Ark managed to get fame and wealth at the same time in reality. However, when he entered New World a gloomy reality awaited him.

Currently Owned Territory Information Window <Lancel (Silvana)>			
【Territory】	Silvana	【Current Lord】	Ark
【Rating】	C	【Classification】	Large Estate (15 villages present)
【Number of Residents in Territory】	7,040 (▽ Falling)	【Residents’ Bond】	350 (▽ Falling)
【Residents’ Loyalty】	210 (▽ Falling)	【Territory’s Gross Income】	Every 10 days – ??? gold (Impossible to calculate)
【Territory’s Current Assets】	3,700 gold	【Value of the Current Territory】	447,150 (▽ Falling)
【Territory’s Fame】	380,400 (▽ Falling)	【Development】	32,460 (▽ Falling)
【Development Speed】	30,470 (▽ Falling)	【Commerce】	52,290 (▽ Falling)
【Civilization】	46,560 (▽ Falling)	【Armament】	5,500
* Current effects applied to the territory			
<p>【Shrine of War】 Armament +30%, ‘Maintenance of Peace’ effect          &lt;Due to the destruction, the effort will stop until it is reconstructed&gt;</p> <p>【Cathedral’s Support】 Resident’s loyalty +10%, Resident’s Bond +10%          &lt;Due to the destruction, the effort will stop until it is reconstructed&gt;</p> <p>【Mercenary’s Office】 The number of mercenaries that can be hired by the estate</p>			

increases. In addition, if the estate hires mercenaries from the Mercenary's Office then the costs will be reduced based on the rating.

<Due to the destruction, the effort will stop until it is reconstructed>

\* Current situation of the territory

-Residents are in a tough situation so it is difficult to keep the peace. (▽ Falling)

-Some farmland has become impoverished and the income of the territory has sharply decreased. (▽ Falling)

-Some houses have been destroyed so the public sentiment of the residents who lost their homes will be rough. Hurry and prepare shelter and jobs for the residents of the number of inhabitants will suddenly plummet.

"This is the current situation of the territory."

An NPC showed him a thick pile of documents. The one handing him these documents was Rokon, the son of his former assistant Berami. Alan had used the Rwigenberg to invade Nagaran and Silvana with the demons. While most of the residents of the territory were able to escape without large damages, the NPCs and civil servants staying at Silvana castle were wiped out. Therefore Ark had thought Silvana would be empty. But when he arrived at Silvana, there were surprisingly a lot of civil servants handling the task. They were the children of the NPCs that had died. In New World, NPCs with the ability to run the territory were essential. He once again realized that this was an online game no matter how real it felt. However, not all of the empty NPC seats were automatically filled. While the essential seats such as advisor were filled, others remained empty. Anyway, thanks to that Ark was about to confirm Silvana's situation as soon as he connected.

"As you can see, the current situation is very serious. Fortunately the demons concentrated on the castle so many residents escaped but they are still trembling in fear. In addition, many facilities have been destroyed by the battle between the demons and the allied forces. There are many problems but the most urgent one is food. This is supposed to be the time of the spring harvest....."

The business like voice of the assistant Rokon droned into his ear.

'Looking at the figures, the damage is less than I expected.'

Ark stopped listening to Rokon and looked out the window at his territory. After hearing that Alan had occupied Silvana, he had expected Silvana to be turned to ash. However, the actual damage wasn't that serious. Other than the area where the allied forces and demons fought, there was almost no damage to the territory.



‘It is fortunate that Alan’s purpose was to flood the Hell River.’

That’s right. There was a reason for this. If Alan’s purpose was revenge against Ark then he would’ve destroyed Silvana so much that it would’ve been impossible for Silvana to be occupied again. But Alan’s purpose was to flood the Hell River so that was the only thing he concentrated on. If the Hell River flood then Silvana and of course Nagaran would disappear. So there was no need to have the demons purposely destroy Silvana. That’s why Silvana wasn’t destroyed even after the demons occupied it for 10 days. But as expected the development, commerce, civilization, armament, etc.....all of the figures related to the territory development had a drop of 20~30%.

‘But.....’

It was clear that he still received damage. How much had Ark suffered in order to develop the territory? Ark had captured Silvana 1 year and 6 months after the Hermes guild occupied it and he had used all of his secret funds to develop the estate. An astronomical amount of money was invested into it. But those efforts were wasted. The information window said that the territory was C ranked, but if he didn’t improve the falling values within a month then it would fall to a D rank. Of course, due to the Demonic War all administration related to Nagaran had been halted. However, if the rating fell and the territory’s financial deficit would affect the Lord’s salary. That was 6,000 gold in 10 days. It meant the monthly income of 18,000 gold had been paused. And this was deadly for a coalition that only had 4,000 people.

‘Well, the main problem is that the coalition consists of 1,500 NPCs from the beast clan and the Eastern Nation.’

An NPC alliance was different from a user alliance. Ark had to pay the coalition a monthly salary of 2,000 gold every 10 days. That meant Ark needed 6,000 gold every month to maintain the coalition.

‘I would like to discard it but.....’

If the NPCs in the coalition were fired then the relationship with the raccoons and Eastern Nation might be aggravated.

If that happened then it would cause problems with Seutandal and the Underground World, and might even affect the supply of munitions. This was the reason why Ark was concerned about the NPCs when the Hell River flooded. If the NPCs that Ark hired were killed then he would have to pay thousands of gold as compensation. Fortunately, all the NPCs had hid in the closed off room on the 60th floor and were rescued with almost no casualties. But now the maintenance fee was the problem.

‘Anyway, I’ve avoided the worst situation where the military supplies were affected. With the income from that then I can hold on for several months.’

The problem wasn’t the immediate loss. This problem wasn’t one that would improve in several months. Once again, quite a few farmland and facilities had been destroyed in Silvana. It wasn’t simply that they were destroyed. It meant a lot of residents on the territory lost their jobs and homes. The income of the territory was also subject to taxes. Yet the residents of the territory had lost their jobs. In that situation, the residents wouldn’t be able to pay the taxes and would have to claim the unemployment benefits. However, Silvana only had 3,700 gold remaining. It wasn’t enough to help the 7,000 victims. It also wasn’t enough to restore the farmland and the destroyed facilities.

“They’ve become impoverished and lost their houses so the residents’ public sentiment is low. In this situation, the territory would become violent and prone to plunder. However, most of the soldiers stationed in the territory have died in battle so it isn’t easy to maintain public security. Swift action is required.”

Rokon explained the situation. Ark was also worried about that part. He couldn’t collect taxes from residents without a job. Without jobs then the residents couldn’t pay taxes. It was a vicious cycle.....If it continued then the residents would eventually riot. It was indeed a death flag. If he proceeded like this then there was no way for the territory to recover. There was only one way to solve this problem.

‘Money.....’

That’s right. Whether it was a game or reality, the only thing that mattered in the end was money.

If he used the money to restore the businesses then the residents could get jobs. If the residents got jobs then it was possible to pay taxes. If taxes were restored then it was possible to invest in more businesses and restore more jobs. The residents would return to the territory and Silvana could continue developing like before.

“Rokon, what is the most urgent problem right now?”

“The restoration of the reservoir and the farming facilities. If they are restored then we can supply jobs to residents and reduce the burden of a food problem.”

“The amount of funds necessary?”

“At least a minimum of 300,000 gold is required.”

“300,000 gold.....”

Ark felt breathless as his jaw dropped. Currently Silvana had no money at all. In the end, Ark had no choice but to obtain the funds required to repair the territory from outside. However, at the moment Ark already had trouble obtaining the money required to pay the coalition members. How could he manage to gain 300,000 gold?

“There’s only one way I can get that type of money.”

Ark murmured as he thought out loud. Then Rokon seemed to sense what he was thinking.

“..... Investment?”

In fact, Silvana had the concept of investments. In other words, he could receive investments from users and NPCs in order to finance the development of the territory. Of course, all the money received would be the territory’s public funds. After a certain period of time had passed, those who invested would be able to get dividends from their investment. If he used such a system that the territory could receive the necessary development and the investors could safely receive profit. But he didn’t have any investors that he could recruit. If they invested in the territory then they could safely make money. So if he wanted people to invest then they needed to get some benefits. That’s right. It was similar to the benefits that the coalition members received after they invested in the estate.

‘But the coalition and Dark Eden has already invested most of their funds.’

That’s right. It was the special privilege of the coalition members! And not long ago, Silvana had been quickly developing.

How could the coalition members and Dark Eden give up such privileges? Therefore Ark and the coalition had already reached the limit of how much they could invest. But now Silvana was broke. The dissatisfied complaints from the coalition members who invested in it were enough to give him a headache. In the end, he could only procure foreign investment. However.....

“It isn’t a few gold but 300,000 gold. Even if 300,000 pours in, the territory still won’t be completely recovered. It won’t be easy to find people willing to invest in the territory.”

Rokon replied in a sceptical voice.

.....That was the problem. If Silvana grew without any problems then he could even get 1 million gold as investment. However, Silvana was an estate where riots could occur at any moment. Even if the demons were driven away, there was no telling if they would return. And if Silvana was ruined that all that invested money would fly away. No user would be willing to invest in such an insecure territory.

'There's also a limit. Individuals can only invest a maximum of 100 gold into the territory. If everybody paid the necessary amount then I would need at least a minimum of 3,000 investors.'

Currently Silvana only had 3,700 gold so it wasn't easy to feed the victims. Even if they ate flour porridge, wouldn't that only last one week at most? In the end, he needed to secure investments from at least 3,000 people in one week. It was impossible.

'Do I just have to watch as Silvana perishes?'

He had desperately tried to protect it for 10 days yet the result was like this.....

"Dammit!"

Ark slammed his hand on the desk. Then a piece of paper fell from the piled up documents. The document that fell had 317,000 gold written on it.

'What the? 317, 100 gold?'

Currently he had turned Silvana upside down and there was no more money. So what was the amount stated on the paper? Had he forgotten a possible source of money? Ark picked up the document with that thought in his mind. But he soon became disappointed as he read the contents of the document.

"Ah, damn. I forgot about this. The number just has to be 317,000 gold? Having this dangled in my face. If only I could invest it in Silvana....."

Ark flinched and looked back at the document.

"Wait? Maybe.....no, I'll just have to believe that it will work!"

After thinking for a while, Ark stood up and shouted.

"Rokon, summon all of Nagaran's lords immediately!"

After a while.....

Buzz, buzz.

Inside a conference room in Silvana castle. Users were gathered and talking noisily. They were the 11 lords of Nagaran. The reason why Ark summoned them was because of the paper he found in his office. This was the present state of the amount of munitions each alliance used in defending Nagaran.

The 4,800 Aramis alliance members from Radon territory (Military provisions and basic equipment): 24,000 gold

The 5,200 Golden Cross alliance members from Beiku territory (Military provisions and basic equipment): 26,000 gold

“The 4,900 Union alliance members from Gurana territory (Military Provisions and basic supplies): 24,500 gold.....

<The total cost of munitions that 63,420 people from the 12 territories: 317, 100 gold>

It was the cost of munitions that the allied forces used in this war. The reason that Ark investigated this was simple. Before the start of the battle, Ark had asked for help from the Schudenberg Kingdom. But the Schudenberg Kingdom was focused on the Sinius Principality and didn't dispatch any troops. Instead, they promised to pay for the munitions that Ark used.

Well, the allied forces actually used a lot of military supplied. Generally when recruiting soldiers from each kingdom, a basic distribution of 5 gold per person was given. That's why the Schudenberg Kingdom said that they would support them. Yet there were 60,000 people and that ended up adding to 317,100 gold! It was a colossal amount. But each individual person in the allied forces is only receiving 5 gold.'

This was the idea that Ark had after seeing the documents. That's right. While the Schudenberg Kingdom would be paying them more than 300,000 gold, each individual member would only receive 5 gold. And the users had an average level of 350 so 5 gold wasn't a large amount of money. If he persuaded the allied forces then he could invest the 317,100 gold from the Schudenberg Kingdom into Silvana.

'I just need to believe. If I can't receive the 317,100 gold investment then it is the end for Silvana!'

“.....So if everyone is willing to help a little bit.”

Ark explained the circumstances and humbly asked with a lowered head. There was no other hole that money could come out of. If he couldn't gain the money that Silvana would go down the drain. Of course, it wasn't that easy to receive an investment from the lords of Nagaran. However, this was Ark's last method. Ark was even prepared to grab the hem of their pants to beg. However.....

“I understand.”

"Of course I know the decision isn't easy. But each individual will only receive 5 gold at most. If you think about.....huh?"

Ark was trying to persuade them when he suddenly raised his head.

".....What did you say just now?"

"We will listen to Ark-nim and invest."

"R-really?"

He thought that the lords were assenting too easily. When Ark's mouth dropped open, Aramis who was the lord of Radon laughed and said.

"We are also lords. We can guess Silvana's situation just by looking at it. Of course we are competitors but didn't you risk your life in order to protect Nagaran? That's why all of the lords have agreed to help Ark-nim."

"Yes. If it wasn't for Ark-nim then we would've lost our territories."

"Furthermore, even if the total is 300,000 gold then we will still only receive 5 gold like Ark-nim said."

"We have to live and help each other."

The lords smiled as they spoke generously. Ark just looked at them dumbly. Ark naturally expected the lords to reject the investment offer. In other words, he had been trying to think of things to persuade them. Yet they had already decided to help before he even asked for it? Why? They might've worked together to protect Nagaran but they were still competitors. If they left it alone then a strong competitor would disappear.

'If it was me.....'

Ark thought inwardly before wincing. And he slowly examined each of their faces. The memory of the past 10 days floated into his head. They had been treated coldly by the NPCs of Schudenberg Kingdom and had to depend on Ark to stop Alan and the demons. They had barely slept and fought against the 100,000 demons for the last 10 days. Of course, they only fought with Ark to protect their territories. However, it wasn't important why they fought. The important thing was that they fought together! That's right. Ark was already the leader of the 11 lords, no the 60,000 soldiers! They were fellow soldiers who had desperately struggled with each other for 10 days!

‘.....There is no option but to help.’

When he thought about it, that was the only answer. And he felt a strange emotion that he had never experienced in New World before. So far JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members, Roco, etc. were the only users that Ark had interacted with. The other users were divided into two types. The enemy. Or people he could take advantage of. He therefore had no other expectations from the players. He thought that was enough and anymore was unnecessary. But Ark miscalculated.

‘Damn, it’s not that bad?’

That’s right. Someone.....the feeling of enjoying the game together with other users wasn’t bad. In this situation, Ark couldn’t reject those feelings. It was no different from the feelings Ark felt when building relationships with NPCs.

“Thank you!”

Ark humbly lowered his head. For the first time since he started New World, Ark truly thanks some users.

Even after all this, Ark never imagined the situation he would experience in Selebrid.

## **Act 6: Duke Sarkin’s Plot**

“What are you saying?”

Ark couldn’t understand what had gone wrong. The day before, Ark had painstakingly found a way to repair Silvana thanks to the help of Nagaran’s lords. If he used the funds that Schudenberg Kingdom promised to pay for the military supplies than it could be used to finance Silvana’s recovery projects.

‘That’s it. Now I can raise the funds to repair Silvana!’

The only thing left was to receive the money and start fixing the reservoir and farmlands. Of course, not all the problems could be solved with that amount of money. It would take time and effort before Silvana returned to normal. However, that money felt like he had come back alive from the brink of hell.

'I can't afford to waste even one more second or minute!'

So Ark hopefully ran to Selebrid. And he presented the document that Rokon drew up about the military supplies funding to the Finance Minister. However, the Finance Minister just tilted his head to one side and said.

"What is this?"

"What? It is the bill for the funding of the military supplies that His Majesty promised for the Nagaran battle.

"The bill for the military supplies? I don't know what you're saying."

Lipton who was the grey haired middle aged aristocrat in charge of the treasury muttered with a frown.

"That is impossible. When the demons invaded Nagaran 10 days ago, Lord Haverstein who is the commander of the expedition couldn't give any support troops so he promised to pay for the necessary military supplies."

"Hmmm....."

Lipton scanned the document after hearing Ark's explanation. Then he nodded and said.

"Okay. Then did you bring the issued form?"

"The issued form?"

"Yes, you raised 60,000 troops according to this form. The funding you require is more than 300,000 gold. If you were promised that type of funding then shouldn't a form have been issued?"

"T-that is....."

Ark was totally at a loss. He had been so busy at the time that he hadn't even thought about it. No, he didn't want to waste even one second so



he hadn't thought about it. There was no time to collect such documents from his allies. Lipton asked in an outraged tone after seeing Ark's panic.

"What? You want the treasury to pay 300,000 gold without such documents?"

"But it is true. Can't you check it?"

"Check it? With who?"

Lipton glared and asked. Ark replied.

"Didn't I tell you? The communication office who contacted the expedition told us that His Majesty had promised to pay the funding. It must be an obvious mistake if the forms weren't submitted to the Finance Minister. If you contact the communication officer then you can confirm it!"

Lipton's eyes suddenly narrowed and he said.

"That would be the communication officer in charge of the expedition a month ago? He was dismissed from his position a week ago due to bribery charges. His actions after that are unclear."

"Huh?"

Ark was completely astonished by Lipton's words. The communication officer had been accused of bribery and now his whereabouts was unknown? How was that possible? Ark made an absurd expression and said.

"Viscount Haverstein, the expedition commander was also with me when I heard it."

"Hey."

Lipton rubbed his face and asked in a tired voice.

"You claimed that the King promised funding but you didn't bring any papers related to that. The witness you claimed is the communications

officer who was stripped of his position due to bribery charges and ran away. And now you claim that another witness is Lord Haverstein who is the commander of the expedition who isn't here. That's my summary of the situation. Yet you want the Schudenberg treasury to pay you 300,000 gold?"

.....The situation was becoming dirty and twisted up. However, Ark couldn't possibly give up the 300,000 gold. If he gave up 300,000 gold then Silvana would be ruined. Besides, the 300,000 gold wasn't just Ark's money. It was the money he borrowed from the 60,000 Nagaran allied forces. In other words, if Ark couldn't obtain the 300,000 gold then he would be in debt. Silvana would fail and Ark would be sitting on a pile of debt. In addition, it wasn't any different from betraying the faith of the allied forces. He couldn't just leave it like this.

"Then His Majesty, please check with the King!"

The cornered Ark shouted. Lipton's eyes became even more incredulous.

"You want me to check with His Majesty? Are you serious?"

"Yes, if you check with His Majesty then you will know the truth....."

Ark suddenly flinched and held his tongue. He had been desperate after hearing Lipton's words. But now that he thought about it, he sensed a somewhat subtle nuance. Haverstein who knew Ark wasn't here. Therefore it sounded like Ark was just trying to use Haverstein's name to rip off money from the kingdom.

'.....There is something strange.'

Ark had clearly confirmed the message in the headquarters of the expedition force. Yet the Finance Minister wasn't convinced no matter what he said. Furthermore, the communication officer in charge of that communication had been stripped of his position due to bribery charges. What was the chance that such a coincidence could happen?

'Is this someone's scheme?'

Ark suddenly had that idea. That's right. Someone had deliberately removed the communications officer who had talked to Ark. The communications officer then disappeared with a bad name. Ark had no choice but to receive confirmation from either Haverstein or the king. However, if this was someone's scheme then the king wouldn't know the details about the funding. If the Finance Minister talked to the king and he didn't know anything then it would be like Ark tried to embezzle 300,000 gold. If the King then asked Haverstein then he might become known as Ark's accomplice and be forced to resign from the position of the expedition commander. And if Haverstein was removed from the position then the person that would profit the most was.....

'Duke Sarkin!'

The name popped into his head and all his doubts were gone. Duke Sarkin could easily bribe the communication officer to deliver the message and then remove him. Moreover, the Finance Minister Lipton was an aristocrat who belonged in Sarkin's faction. Then wouldn't the picture naturally emerge?

'Oh my god, if so.....'

In the end, the funding that had been promised was only Duke Sarkin's plot to entrap Ark and Haverstein? Ark immediately realized his intentions after thinking about it. The only way to solve this problem was to reveal Sarkin's scheme. However, the communications officer had disappeared and the only other people who knew about it were Lariette and Nadin.

Nadin was in Sarkin's pocket so it wasn't necessary to speak about it but Lariette was a user so her word wouldn't be accepted. The only remaining person was Haverstein. However, there wasn't anyone who didn't know the relationship between Ark and Haverstein. Since Duke Sarkin controlled the communications officer, the evidence didn't exist and Ark and Haverstein would be accused of embezzlement.

'If I ask the check with the King then it won't be fixed!'

He knew that. But Ark couldn't just give up. If he withdrew without the recovery funds then Silvana would be ruined. However, that was nothing. The Nagaran allied forces had promised the war funds to Ark. If he didn't receive the funding then Ark would have to pay 300,000 gold to Nagaran's allied forces instead. And if he couldn't pay the 300,000 gold.....Then the 60,000 allied forces would become his enemy! Ark and Haverstein would be dropped into hell. It was a well thought out scheme from the beginning.

".....There has absolutely been a mistake. I will check and come back again."

Ark said after worrying for a while. Lipton who had expected Ark's destruction just nodded.

"It is still too early to conclude."

Ark exited the building and muttered while shaking his head. Although he was suspicious inside the office, he wasn't 100% sure that this was Duke Sarkin's plot. Maybe it was just some error?

"The first thing I need to check is whether the king actually granted the funding."

Ark came to that conclusion. If the king was aware of it then this situation would be simply resolved. The problem was how to confirm it.

"If this is indeed Duke Sarkin's scheme then asking the Finance Minister to check will open me to accusations of embezzlement. I have to confirm it without going through the Finance Minister."

Therefore Ark went straight to the residence of Marquis Daltin. It was possible for him to meet the king in Selebrid and he had helped Ark before. After Ark explained the circumstances to Daltin.....

"I visited him."

Marquis Daltin took off his coat and said with a bitter voice.

"I consulted with His Majesty about the problems in the Sinius Principality and tried to stealthily ask about Nagaran. I said that they 100,000 demons were defeated so the army should be somewhat compensated. But Duke Sarkin decisively disagreed. And His Majesty didn't show any special interest."

"Then....."

"His Majesty didn't know about the military support funding."

Ark felt like the sky was crashing down after hearing those words. If the King had decided to grant funding to Nagaran and then decided to pull it then he would have a reaction to Daltin's words. The fact that he showed no reaction meant he didn't hear anything in regards to funding Nagaran. Ark's speculation that it was a plot had come true.

"It's good that you didn't respond to Lipton's provocation and visited me first. If he tried to confirm it with the king then you and Haverstein would be accused of embezzlement. Haverstein would be instantly dismissed from the commander's position. You haven't completely fallen into Duke Sarkin's plot."

He was indeed fortunate. But the results didn't really change for Ark. If he couldn't secure the funds then Ark's worst case situation would soon become a reality. Silvana would soon collapse without the recovery funds and he would owe the 60,000 allied forces a 300,000 debt. Of course, if he explained the circumstances to the lords then they would probably understand. But their good impression of him would be gone and Silvana would also disappear.

'What did I spend 10 days barely sleeping for?'

He felt his anger explode.

'Duke Sarkin.....!'

He grinded his teeth together. This was the first time he felt such fury against a NPC. Right now he was tempted to go visit Sarkin and just

stab him. No, if Silvana was ruined then he really would cut off Sarkin's neck. But now wasn't the time to be thinking about something like that.

'Is there another way?'

"If we find the communication officer that Duke Sarkin bribed then the situation would be simple to fix. Then it wouldn't be a problem. That officer impersonated His Majesty and sent a false message to the battlefield. If that was revealed then even Duke Sarkin wouldn't be safe. Do you understand?"

He understood. This was Duke Sarkin's scheme. It was a scheme that he prepared carefully. Then wasn't the key to this scheme the communication officer? Lipton said that the communications officer had been charged with bribery but he had probably been removed by Sarkin. The problem was that the communication officer had disappeared. While Ark had fallen into despair, he grasped Daltin's hand and said.

"Will the Marquis help me?"

"What did you say? I can't do anything unless you find the communications officer."

"It is no use revealing Duke Sarkin's scheme."

"Then what can I do to help?"

"Needless to say, the promise of support money for Nagaran was all Duke Sarkin's scheme. But no matter the scheme, doesn't Nagaran's allied forces deserve Schudenberg's support? If Nagaran's allied forces hadn't stopped the 100,000 demons and the Hell River from flooding then the demons within the Sinius Principality would become even stronger. Didn't Nagaran's allied forces stop that? Can't you remind His Majesty and suggest the possibility of some support funding?"

This was the final method that Ark came up with. Even if he wanted to now, assassinating Sarkin wouldn't solve Ark's problem. More than Sarkin's neck, Ark needed to obtain 300,000 gold. It didn't matter how

he got it. Getting 300,000 gold from the kingdom was the most urgent problem.

“That is difficult.”

Daltin sighed and shook his head.

“Duke Sarkin wanted to hang you and Haverstein with this scheme. But you didn’t give into Lipton’s provocation so he missed the chance to get Haverstein. Can’t you be satisfied that you dealt some damage to Sarkin’s plot? Duke Sarkin is the one who arranged everything about this scheme. Of course you want to make a desperate stand against Duke Sarkin. Even if I try to oppose it, Duke Sarkin is the one who controls the kingdom’s finances so the King won’t easily agree.”

“But if you and Marquis Halben join together.....”

It was the only thing he could believe in. Ark desperately entreated. However, Daltin’s reaction was still sceptical.

“.....It might be possible. But the timing right now isn’t really good.”

“The timing isn’t good?”

“You just came from Nagaran so you wouldn’t know about it yet.”

Daltin scratched his beard and murmured.

“Not long ago, the Bristania and Schudenberg expeditions managed to drive all the demons from the Sinus Principality. No, to be exact the demons felt a crisis after the expeditions advanced and retreated.”

Of course Ark knew that information. He had received it from the Dark Eden members who were delivering supplies to the Sinus Principality. In addition, the news about New World on the TV and internet were all concentrated on the Demonic War. The demons retreating from the Sinus Principality was a major event. However, the reason why the demons retreated was still unknown. The expedition armies had gained consecutive victories and managed to control the Silrinad area but there

were still lots of demons left. Yet all the demons had suddenly retreated from the Sinius Principality like a flood. Therefore the users had many differing opinions about why the demons disappeared. It was the same for the NPCs.

“There are various theories but nothing is certain. But thanks to that, the Bristania-Schudenberg expeditions succeeded in regaining the Sinius Principality.”

..... And a new problem began from this.

“It isn’t an exaggeration to say that the Sinius Principality is impoverished and on the verge of collapse thanks to the demons. Furthermore, most of the royal family and nobles were killed. Only several royalty and local lords barely survived. So Bristania and Schudenberg has agreed to divide the Sinius Principality and govern it for the next 10 years.”

Daltin spoke while tapping his finger on the table. Ark immediately grasped the aims of Bristania and Schudenberg after hearing Daltin’s speech. Bristania and Schudenberg had sent military expeditions to regain the Sinius Principality from the demons. While it was to stop the demons, they had another reason for saving the Sinius Principality. It was the right to request a reward from the Sinius Principality. However, the Sinius Principality was devastated by the demons and couldn’t afford to give anything. Therefore Bristania and Schudenberg gained the right to split the Sinius Principality and govern it for the next 10 years. But that was just a pretext. The Sinius Principality had been completely destroyed by the demons. The atmosphere was polluted after being exposed to the black fog for a long time so there was no guarantee it would be properly restored in 10 years. Even if Bristania and Schudenberg governed for 10 years, there was no benefit in it for them. No, they actually had to invest a lot of money into the recovery work. Yet there was a simple reason why the two controls divided it up.

“This is a chance to swallow up the territory of the impoverished Sinius Principality.”



Daltin laughed as he laid both elbows on the table. That's right. Bristania and the Schudenberg kingdoms intended to colonize the Sinius Principality. On the pretext of dividing the territories, the Governor of each estate intended to fully absorb it. From the moment they organized the military expedition, they hadn't been thinking about profit. But it wasn't as easy as it sounded.

"Didn't you say that some of the royal family survived? If some royalty is still alive then wouldn't the two kingdoms have no justification for absorbing the territories?"

"That is normally the case. But this is the Sinius Principality."

Daltin smiled and explained. The land in a kingdom was basically the property of the king. While the reality is a little different but each Lord and general citizen is just borrowing the real estate from the King. That's why no other country could claim the territory if the Lord died. But the Sinius Principality was different from other kingdoms.

"Sinius is not a kingdom. It is a principality where dozens of species combined together. The royal family of the Sinius Principality are nothing but representatives of the species. And the representatives of each species each have a territory. But after a long time, the various species mixed together."

That's why the Sinius Principality was engulfed in chaos. With the territories deprived of their representative, chaos and anarchy crept in and there were quite few cases of aggression against neighbouring territories. Therefore the Sinius Principality felt it was necessary to establish leadership for each territory.

"Those with the right tokens will gain ownership of the territory in the Sinius Principality."

"Tokens?"

"Yes, look at this."

Daltin opened a piece of silk fabric and showed a piece of jewellery. Inside was a ring with a glowing purple stone.

-Soul Ring (Legendary)

Item type: Ring

User Restriction: NPC aristocrats only

A ring inlaid with a brilliantly shining ore.

The residents who live in the northeast area of Morai on the continent believe that the soul of their ancestors reside in the ore. A long time ago, the King of the Sinius Principality was asked to pick a symbol to represent Morai and he picked this ore ring with no hesitation. When shown this ring then all Morai residents will pledge vows of loyalty. Those who own this ring will be given the right to govern Morai territory. However, this is impossible for foreigners as a large majority of residents in New World don't respect them. Therefore it is only for NPCs. Only a noble NPC with a high status can use this ring to claim ownership of the territory.

<Special Option: It is possible to claim ownership of the Morai territory>

"This is a symbol that the Bristania expedition got their hands on."

"Bristania? Then why does Marquis-nim own this?"

"The token ended up with the Schudenberg expedition. Because the territory that the Soul Ring rules over is located in the northeast area governed by the Schudenberg Kingdom. We gave the Bristania expedition a token for an area in the northwest. This was due to the negotiations."

Ark now understood the situation. The Sinius Principality had been completely destroyed by the demons. And the Bristania and Schudenberg army had defeated the demons. They also recovered the tokens representing the territories from the demons. But these tokens weren't primarily a possession of the Sinius Principality. Each of the

lords for those territories were dead so the expedition who found the tokens claimed ownership. So the tokens were divided between the Bristania and Schudenberg kingdom after the war was over.....and they were able to claim the rights to the territory.

“The Sinius Principality has 26 different territories. Only 9 royalty and lords survived. In the end, that means that 17 territories have no owners. The Bristania Kingdom is governing 7 territories in the northwest while Schudenberg is governing 10 territories in the northeast.”

Schudenberg was able to gain more territories because they reached Silrinad first and gained the initiative.

“Then 10 territories in the Sinius Principality belong to Schudenberg Kingdom?”

“That’s not it.”

Daltin shook his head with a tired expression.

“Out of the 10 territories given to Schudenberg kingdom, only tokens for 6 territories have been found. The whereabouts of the remaining tokens are unclear. That is why I can’t take to His Majesty about funding for Nagaran’s military supplies.”

The Schudenberg kingdom only had tokens for 6 territories out of 10....In other words, most of the aristocrats with the tokens would own the estate while those without one would have to return the token after 10 years. So there was a fierce fight between the three factions of Duke Sarkin, Marquis Halben and Marquis Daltin to find the token so they could gain an advantage over the other factions. That was because their influence would become bigger if their subordinates governed a territory. And tomorrow was the final meeting to decide what nobles to dispatch to the territories. If Daltin mentioned funding 300,000 gold to Nagaran’s allied forces then it was just an opportunity to be caught by Duke Sarkin and Marquis Halben.

"If I mention this then I won't have any influence over who to send as a governor. The meeting is tomorrow and I've only managed to secure two tokens after negotiations with Bristania."

"Then what about Marquis Halben?"

"Marquis Halben was also able to obtain two. But Haverstein is the commander of the expedition force so one territory will be entrusted to him. That means his faction has 3 territories."

Ark tilted his head after hearing Daltin's words. Schudenberg Kingdom had found 6 tokens. Marquis Daltin had 2 and Halben had 3 so only one was left.

'Then Duke Sarkin only managed to obtain one token?'

Duke Sarkin's faction was the most influential among the three factions. So wasn't it strange that he only found one token? Daltin nodded after hearing Ark's question and replied.

"Yes, Duke Sarkin only secured one token. So he will obtain the right to temporarily govern the 4 territories where the tokens haven't been found."

"But what happens if he can't find the token after 10 years? Moreover, the territories have become ruins. He would have to invest a huge amount of income in order to restore the businesses. There is no guarantee how long that will take. There is no security that he can recover the amount of funds invested after 10 years."

"That's right. But he might be able to find the tokens without those 10 years."

'Is it really like that?'

Ark couldn't completely agree with Daltin's words. If Sarkin found the token during those 10 years then he could claim ownership of the territory. If that happened then Sarkin would obtain 5 territories in the

Sinius Principality. However, it was just a gamble. The odds of victory were low.

The reason was simple. The Sinus Principality had been occupied by the demons so of course the tokens would be lost. But the expedition forces defeated the demons and couldn't find all the tokens. If the demons retreated then it was natural to think that they took the tokens with them. In the end, it was highly unlikely that the token would be found within the territory. Daltin and Halben didn't want the territories with no tokens so it had passed onto Sarkin. The question was why Sarkin accepted. Even if he invested huge amounts of money into the territory, if he couldn't find the token then he would have to return it 10 years later. The revenue he would gain from the territory would be no match for how much he invested. So why would Sarkin do something that would lose him money? There must be something. Sarkin was clearly up to something.

'If I was Duke Sarkin, what would be my reason.....?'

Ark's eyes suddenly flashed. There was only one reason Ark could think of for Sarkin's behaviour.

'Sarkin must've already obtained the tokens!'

That's right. If he thought like that then all his questions were answered. Over 30% of the soldiers in the expedition army belonged to Duke Sarkin. If Sarkin used those soldiers then he could easily smuggle the tokens from under Haverstein's eyes.

'That is why Haverstein couldn't find the tokens. If Sarkin only had 1 token then Daltin and Halben would easily concede the four territories to him. In the end, Sarkin will sneakily manage to obtain 5 territories.'

He could recognize the smell of someone similar to him! If Ark had the same power as Sarkin then he would probably do the same thing to obtain the four territories.....

'What if these facts were made known?'

Of course Sarkin would pay the price for tricking the King!

‘But how do I prove it?’

.....That was the problem. If Sarkin succeeded in gaining 5 territories then he would have even more influence. However, if it was revealed then Sarkin would receive a fatal blow. That’s why all the soldiers involved in retrieving the tokens must be kept under tight security. Ark had one day left to find a way to damage Sarkin. The meeting tomorrow afternoon will bestow the rights to the 4 territories to Sarkin. How could he prove that Sarkin had discovered the tokens beforehand? He had to prove that Sarkin had the tokens before the meeting started.

‘Sarkin is probably the only one who knows where the token is hidden. It is probably hidden inside Duke Sarkin’s house.

That’s right. Sarkin was a person who plotted several schemes. If there was something dangerous that could strangle him then he would always place it right next to him. And that was Ark’s biggest difficulty. Once again, New World was a game which allowed infinite degrees of freedom. If the user wanted to then they could assassinate a NPC or steal from one. Even so, there was one reason why they couldn’t rob the house of an NPC! Most of the houses of high ranking NPCs had crime prevention security that couldn’t even be compared to dungeons. If they did one thing wrong then the user would become chaotic and guards would flock like bees. Moreover, Duke Sarkin was one of the most influential nobles in Schudenberg. Even a professional assassin like Shambala wouldn’t be able to enter without being detected.

‘I only have one day left. After that there will be no more chances to find evidence. If I want to enter directly then I need a search warrant like in the movies. Anyway, now I have nothing to lose. Either he dies or I die.....’

Ark made a determined expression. Suddenly there were fierce sparks inside Ark’s head.

‘That’s right. There is such that method!’

After organizing his thoughts, Ark stood up and shouted.

“Marquis-nim, do you have any papers with Duke Sarkin’s seal?”

“Duke Sarkin’s seal? I have a few but....”

“Please prepare it for me.”

A brutal smile appeared on Ark’s face as his eyes narrowed and he began to talk.

## **Act 7: Viscount Ark**

“The meeting will start in 5 minutes!”

The chief director of the King’s Hall shouted. The soldiers blew through the trumpet and announced that the meeting time was imminent. This meeting was to decide the aristocrats that would be dispatched to the 10 territories in the Sinius Principality. Once the trumpets starting sounding, the aristocrats began to gather in the King’s Hall.

‘Now, it is time to start.....’

Ark who was standing at the entrance of the King’s Hall and looked at the nobles with bright eyes. After a moment, he saw a grey-haired old man surrounded by other nobles. The old man that looked like a raccoon was Duke Sarkin.

Ark quickly ran over and lowered his head.

“Duke Sarkin-nim, hello?”

“Huh? You are?”

“I’m Baron Ark.”

“Ah, you are the upstart foreigner who managed to become an aristocrat?”

Duke Sarkin muttered with a mocking smile. The nobles trailing Sarkin muttered among themselves. But Ark just pasted a casual smile on his face and nodded.

“Yes, I am that upstart foreigner.”

“Bah. Yes, then what business does a foreigner like you have with me?”

“I came to tell you this despite your disrespect.”

“I don’t know what you’re saying but I have nothing to say to you.”

Duke Sarkin looked Ark up and down with an unpleasant look and turned his back.

“Aren’t you going to regret it?”

“What?”

“I picked something like this up.”

Ark laughed as he took out a scroll from his bag and shook it. Anger flared in Sarkin’s eyes at Ark’s provocation. But his face stiffened after he looked at the contents of the scroll. He suddenly ran forward like an angry wild boar and stretched his arm towards the scroll. However, a sixty year old man was no match for Ark. Ark just turned his body like he was dancing and Sarkin fell to the ground. When Sarkin fell, the nobles flinched and grabbed their sword hilts.

“You bastard! What are you doing?”

“Oh? Why don’t you wait and see?”

Ark muttered and laughed. Duke Sarkin got up and yelled.

“Stop!”

“Huh? But.....”



"Didn't you hear me? I want to talk with him so you guys enter the hall first."

Sarkin stared at the nobles and gave them an order. The nobles looked puzzled by Sarkin's changed attitude but obediently entered the King's Hall. Ark whistled and clapped like he admired Sarkin's behaviour.

"As expected of Duke Sarkin-nim, your judgement is really fast."

"You bastard.....what? How did you get that?"

"This letter? Didn't I tell you? I picked it up. This letter has Duke-nim's seal on it. So this upstart foreigner came to talk to you."

"Then it's not necessary to speak for a long time. Give it to me."

"So you admit that this letter is yours?"

Sarkin's face stiffened at Ark's question. His forehead wrinkled and he started at Ark for a while with narrowed eyes before saying in a cold voice.

"And if it's not?"

"Then I have no reason to give this letter to Duke-nim."

".....What will you do if it's mine?"

"I don't know. The contents of the letter are quite suspicious."

Ark smiled and lifted the letter. Duke Sarkin read the contents of the letter with a perplexity.

*To. Nadin*

*Secretly transport the <Laurels of Purity> that has been salvaged to my mansion on the night of the full moon.*

*From Sarkin*

The Laurels of Purity was one of the 22 tokens of the Sinius Principality that Daltin spoke about. It was a token which granted the right to own

the territory to Schudenberg Kingdom! The problem was that the Laurels of Purity haven't been reported to the King yet. In other words, this letter was proof that Duke Sarkin had commanded his subordinates to sneakily obtain the tokens. However, Sarkin shook his head and stubbornly denied it.

"I never wrote that letter!"

"But isn't this Duke-nim's handwriting and even your seal?"

"It's a plot! Someone clearly faked that letter in order to trap me in some plot!"

"That might be true."

Ark grinned and nodded. When Ark nodded, Sarkin flinched and asked in a low voice.

"Perhaps.....it is you?"

"That might be true."

Ark jokingly replied. Then Sarkin looked at him with outraged eyes.

"You must be crazy. Do you think you will be safe if you do something like this?"

"Shouldn't you be more worried about yourself than me?"

"Why should I be worried when you are the one who counterfeited a letter? If I call for an investigation then it will instantly be revealed that this is a counterfeit."

"Yet the content of the letter is between Duke-nim and your subordinate. Shouldn't you be worried?"

"What?"

"Because it doesn't matter if this letter is a counterfeit or not."

Ark narrowed his eyes. And Sarkin twitched like he was worried.

“W-what are you saying?”

“Obviously this letter might be a counterfeit. If examined then it will be revealed whether it is a counterfeit or not. But even if the latter is fake, it will still raise suspicions. Especially if the letter is present during a meeting related to the territories of the Sinius Principality. Since this letter contains potential problems, Marquis Daltin and Halben will no doubt raise objections and the King might even order Duke-nim’s mansion to be searched. Isn’t Duke-nim worried about that?”

That’s right. This was the plan Ark came up with. The letter Ark was holding was one that Jjak-tung created. Ark had asked Daltin for any letters from Sarkin so Jjak-tung could fake his handwriting and seal. Jjak-tung was currently level 350 and his Counterfeit skill had reached ‘High class.’ It was to the extent that Jjak-tung could produce SA counterfeits. However, that wasn’t the reason why Ark faked the letter. There were various specialists that dealt with official documents. Even if it was made with a High Class Counterfeit skill, it would still be revealed as fake.

‘However, that doesn’t matter!’

There was currently a subtle psychological war between Daltin, Halben and Sarkin over the Sinius Principality. In such a situation, the letter would raise suspicions even if it was discovered to be fake. The King and aristocrats wouldn’t be able to leave it alone. And if such problems arose then Ark had already instructed Daltin to raise a huge fuss.

‘In order to dispel the suspicions, the King would have to order Sarkin’s mansion to be searched. And Sarkin has no justification to refuse a house search. That would be like admitting the allegations were true.’

This was one of the reasons Ark made the Counterfeit letter. Ark was convinced that Sarkin had the missing tokens. However, it was impossible for Ark to sneak into Sarkin’s house to secure the evidence. Then the only way was to rally the government authorities to search

Sarkin's mansion. If the tokens were found in Sarkin's house then he would quickly be ruined.

'But if the token isn't found at Sarkin's house.....'

Then it would be Ark in a difficult situation. He would be charged with forgery and blackmail and would rot in a jail cell.

That's why Ark met with Sarkin before submitting the letter to the King.

And Sarkin had removed his subordinates as soon as he saw the letter.

Sarkin made some instinctive judgements the moment he saw the letter. And Ark's conviction became even stronger after seeing that judgement.

'Obviously Sarkin left the tokens in his house!'

"Y-you.....!"

Duke Sarkin grinded his teeth together and trembled at Ark's words. Ark just smirked and laughed.

"Shut up you old man."

"What, what the?"

"Weren't you the one who started it first? Do you think I don't know about your scheme with Nagaran's funding? But you misjudged me. Even if I have to die, I won't let go of my dirty nature. If I have to die then let's die together."

Ark growled and approached Sarkin. Sarkin winced and murmured.

"....What do you want?"

"Now you're ready for a proper conversation?"

"You seem to be misunderstanding something. The nerves of the nobles are sharp over the problem of dividing the territories. I have no wish to strain His Majesty's mind with such an ugly accusation."

As expected from a noble, Sarkin still tried to avoid showing any weaknesses. He thought for a short moment before suggesting.

“Do you want the funding for Nagaran’s military supplies? Will that settle it?”

“Is this a joke?”

Ark shouted with a displeased expression.

“That is a fair compensation that the allied forces should’ve received in the first place. It is a difficult situation because you’re the one who played a trick in the middle. Yet now you think offering it as compensation will settle things? Furthermore, that is Schudenberg Kingdom’s money. Doesn’t that mean you won’t be damaged?”

“The meeting will commence in 1 minute! All aristocrats who haven’t entered yet then please hurry! The King’s Hall will close as soon as the meeting starts!”

Once again the chief director in front of the King’s Hall shouted. A hurried look appeared on Sarkin’s face. This was why Ark used the counterfeit letter to threaten Sarkin before the meeting started. If the cunning Sarkin had time then he would secretly try to hide the tokens somewhere else. However, if there were only a few minutes left until the meeting then he wouldn’t have time to think.

“Then what do you want?”

“If you sign an agreement that you will provide the funds to restore Silvana then I will leave it alone.”

“What, what the? You.....!”

Sarkin’s face wrinkled after hearing Ark’s answer. All the funds necessary to restore Silvana?

Wasn’t it shameful? When considering the amount of money required to restore Silvana, it took a lot more than 300,000 gold. 300,000 gold was just the money required to put out the urgent fire and restore some

businesses. Millions of gold were actually required to make sure that Silvana was perfected recovered. No matter how much influence he had, Duke Sarkin would go bankrupt if he had to pay the millions of gold.

“I’m not crazy. You think I would pay all of that for a fake letter? Okay. It seems like your brain isn’t working. Time is wasting so I’m going to go. Do what you want.” Sarkin turned around like he didn’t care anymore.

Ark felt his heart drop. In fact, forging a letter to threaten Sarkin was just a gamble. If Sarkin ignored it then he couldn’t hand the letter to the king. The reason was simple. If the king didn’t give the order to search Sarkin’s house then Ark would be the one in trouble for forgery and blackmail. It was a very high possibility. And there was no guarantee even if Duke Sarkin’s house was searched. Searching a house wasn’t as easy as it sounded. And Duke Sarkin wasn’t stupid so he wouldn’t just display a dangerous item like the tokens somewhere in the open. It would be hidden in a secret place only he knew. There was no guarantee it would be found by the searching soldiers. Yet Sarkin still tried to negotiate with Ark because of his insecurity. Even if the probability was only 0.1%, there was still a chance that Sarkin would lose everything. So he had tried to compromise. Sarkin tried to leave which meant that Ark had exceeded his limit.

‘If Sarkin leaves like this then I will be the one in trouble!’

“W-wait a minute! My words just now were a mistake. I only asked for funds to restore Silvana castle!”

The distressed Ark hurriedly rushed in front of Sarkin and exclaimed. But that was also a failure. Sarkin instantly snubbed him after Ark showed a weakness.

“I’m sorry but I have no intention of negotiating with you anymore.”

“W-wait. My words just now were also a mistake. As a matter of fact..... y-yes! I just want you to pay the cost of reconstructing the

temple that was destroyed during the battle. The 300,000 gold for Nagaran's military supplies and the cost of rebuilding the temple!"

"The cost of rebuilding the temple?"

Sarkin stopped moving. Ark was talking about the Asyeosu temple which covered the entrance to the secret dungeon.

In fact, the secret dungeon had been revealed to the world so there was no reason for a temple to cover it anymore. However, his pride wouldn't allow him to leave with just the 300,000 gold provided by the kingdom. The temple reconstruction would only cost 10,000 gold. If it was that much then it wouldn't be a burden on Sarkin.

"I suppose we can compromise with that."

"The meeting will commence in 30 seconds!"

Once again the voice of the chief director was heard. Although previously Sarkin was the impatient one, the situation had now reversed. If the door to King's Hall closed then Ark wouldn't even be able to claim the 300,000 gold for Nagaran's military supplies. Ark hurriedly pulled out a merchant's agreement and scribbled the contents of the negotiations before giving it to Sarkin.

-A Merchant's Agreement.

<Contractor: Sarkin=Ark>

As a sign of sincerity, Sarkin will pay for the costs of rebuilding the temple in Silvana. The contract will end with the temple is completely rebuilt.

\* The above contract will place the moment Duke Sarkin receives the funding for Nagaran's military supplies from the kingdom.

"Ten seconds left!"

Sarkin hurriedly read the contract and signed it before rushing into the King's Hall. At this time, Sarkin still couldn't imagine what would

happen in the future. The results from this single contract were unexpected.

“Huhuhu. Sarkin, you’re caught now.”

A smile spread on Ark’s mouth as he followed behind Sarkin into the King’s Hall.

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“Okay. Now I just have to find these at a suitable time.”

Sarkin looked at the 4 gems on the table with a satisfied expression. A golden necklace shaped like a laurel wreath, a bracelet with a complicated pattern made of sapphire and platinum, etc..... They were the tokens which symbolized the territories of the Sinus Principality. That’s right. Just like Ark expected, Duke Sarkin had obtained the 4 tokens. He had used his subordinates who entered the war to secretly sneak the tokens away from Haverstein. During the meeting in King’s Hall not long ago, Sarkin had obtained one territory with a token and the four vacant territories. He couldn’t use the tokens to insist on ownership of the territories immediately but 5 estates now belonged to Sarkin.

“With all these territories, Daltin and Halben will no longer be my rivals.”

The amount of territories and nobles determined Sarkin’s influence. And currently 60% of the territories in Schudenberg Kingdom belonged to Sarkin. But Daltin and Halben also possessed quite a few estates. If Sarkin obtained even more territories then there was no faction in the Schudenberg kingdom who was a match for him anymore.

“Ark you fool, soon you will realize what a big mistake you made. You will never be able to set foot in Schudenberg Kingdom again! Hahaha, hahaha!”

Sarkin laughed crazily inside a dark room.



Then a knock on the door suddenly interrupted the atmosphere.

“W-wait a minute.....that’s it. Come in.”

Sarkin placed the tokens inside a secret safe and replied. The door opened and someone came in with a pile of documents.

“What is that?”

“This is the bill from Silvana.”

“Silvana castle? Ah, is that the bill for the reconstruction of the Asyeosu temple? Well, it is slightly unpleasant but if it’s only this degree.....gasp, w-what is this?”

Blood drained from Sarkin’s face as he looked at the bill. He looked at the bill with dumbstruck eyes before standing up and shouting.

“Make preparations! I’m heading to Silvana immediately!”

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Ttukttuk, ttukttuk!

The sound of hammering resonated through Silvana. After negotiations with Ark a week ago, Sarkin had suggested sending support funding for Nagaran during the meeting. With Daltin and Halben also supporting the suggestion, the King eventually gave permission. Ark finally got his hands on the 300,000 gold to repair Silvana. The urgent problem in Silvana was food and water! After gathering Rokon’s opinion, he placed the 300,000 gold into repairing the reservoir and the farmlands. After the 300,000 gold investment, the large estate instantly regained its liveliness.

‘But this is only the beginning.’

Ark turned and smiled. He was looking at the workmen gathered. Just like he told Sarkin, he had hired workmen to restore Asyeosu temple after it was destroyed. But the number wasn’t a joke. The workmen that gathered for the temple was many more times that those required for the

reservoir and farmlands. Why were so many people required to repair a small shrine? Ark was hiding a wicked scheme.

“Lord-nim, Duke Sarkin has come from Selebrid.”

Rokon came in at that moment and told him.

‘Huhuhu, he came.’

Ark laughed and nodded.

“Bring him in.”

“Ark!”

Sarkin pushed past Rokon and ran into the office. Ark asked him with a surprised look.

“Eh? Why did Duke Sarkin come all the way to my castle?”

“Y-you bastard.....what is this?”

Sarkin slammed a bunch of papers down on the desk. Ark browsed through the documents before asking.

“What? The bill for the reconstruction of Asyeosu church? Duke-nim came all this way just because of the cost for the reconstruction? Did you forget about it?”

“Who would forget? I’m talking about the ridiculous amount of money!”

Sarkin trembled as he shouted.

-Expense bill for the reconstruction of Silvana’s Asyeosu temple  
(Labourer Salary: 8, 000 Gold)

-Expense bill for the reconstruction of Silvana’s Asyeosu temple  
(Various material costs: 12, 000 Gold).....

The amount recorded on the bill was beyond Sarkin's imagination. The labourer cost for only one day was 8,000 gold!

The costs for the various materials consumed in one day was 12,000 gold! Due to various other additional costs, the total bill for one day reached 50,000~60,000 gold. That's right. This was the reason why Sarkin frantically hurried to Silvana.

When Ark asked Sarkin to pay the cost for rebuilding Asyeosu temple, Sarkin had thought that 10,000~20,000 gold would be sufficient. If it was only 10,000~20,000 gold then it was worth paying to get rid of he forced letter. The profit he would get from the territories in the Sinus Principality would recoup any loss. Yet the bill had become this ridiculous. Just one week of work had reached 390,000 gold! Therefore Sarkin had suffered a huge blow after just a week. Ark sounded like he didn't know what the problem was.

"The costs listed on the bill are correct."

"Don't make me laugh! How could the temple reconstruction cost 50,000~60,000 gold in one day?"

"Ah, didn't I explain it to you?"

"What? What do you mean?"

"Rokon, explain it to Duke Sarkin."

Ark folded his arms and looked at Rokon. Rokon smiled and clapped. At the same time, soldiers came in with a big panel. Rokon pointed to a large figure painted on the panel and began to talk.

"Then I will start the explanation. As you can see, we've started the reconstruction of Asyeosu temple. Do you see this black part here? This is the underground dungeon where the Hell River is. We are currently working on purifying the underground dungeon and filling it in."

"What, what the? Purifying and filling in the secret dungeon?"

"Yes, that's right. This is just a small temple. Lord-nim wants to rebuild the temple perfectly. But as you can see here, the terrain isn't suitable for

building on. The 60th floor is full of holes. This is also the place where the Hell River spouted up. After getting advice from the Asyeosu church, we decided to purify the earth with holy water and salt before filling in the underground dungeon.”

That’s right. This was the secret to the huge amount of gold behind the reconstruction. Once again, the earth submerged by the Hell River would be barren for 60 years. Thanks to Ark and the allied forces’ efforts, they managed to stop Nagaran from being submerged but some areas were still affected by the Hell River. That was the secret dungeon. After being flooded by the Hell River, the secret dungeon had become barren. Even monsters weren’t resurrected in the secret dungeon anymore. Therefore the secret dungeon was an unnecessary space for Ark. The air was dull and dusty like an abandoned place and it caused a bad atmosphere when it drifted up. Therefore Ark had thought about closing up the secret dungeon when repairing Silvana. That idea changed after the problem with Duke Sarkin occurred.

‘I can’t be sure that Sarkin will be 100% ruined because of the fake letter. If I pass the letter to the king and the tokens couldn’t be found then I would be the one suffering. It is best to use the fake letter to obtain the 300,000 gold.’

Ark thought this after hearing the situation from Daltin. But he thought there was something lacking about only receiving 300,000 gold.

‘If I can’t make Sarkin suffer then my grudge won’t be resolved!’

Then Ark thought of the Asyeosu temple. The Asyeosu temple was built on top of the secret dungeon. If he used the justification of the Asyeosu temple then it would also be applied to the secret dungeon. Obtaining salt, holy water and the labour for filling in the secret dungeon will be expensive.....

‘Sarkin will become broke in just one month!’

That was the details of Ark’s brutal plan. That’s right. Ark had asked for funds to repair Silvana and then they castle in order to make Sarkin less

suspicious and to pave the way for him to accept the offer to repair Asyeosu temple. In order to amplify the damage even further, Ark had waited to collect the bill for one week before sending it. Thanks to that, Sarkin felt like he had been hit by a bomb.

‘It is your mistake for trying to touch me.’

Sarkin became increasingly pale after hearing Rokon’s explanation while Ark just smirked. Finally Rokon reached the final part of the Asyeosu reconstruction project.

“.....Around 30% of the 60th floor in the underground dungeon has been buried. If the rest of the cleansing and filling in goes on schedule then the Asyeosu temple will finish the reconstruction in 1 year.”

“1, 1 year? 50,000~60,000 a day for 1 year?”

Sarkin stuttered with a terrified face after hearing Rokon’s words. Rokon made a serious expression and replied in a diffident voice.

“Let’s see? That isn’t entirely correct. That only covers the initial cost of purification so it will probably require more money as the project progresses. The construction expense will be many times more than now. In addition, we have to pay a salary to the priest who is the advisor for this construction.....”

“That is impossible!”

Sarkin shouted angrily. Then he ran to Ark and grabbed his collar.

“It’s a scam!”

“What do you mean?”

“If there are holes in the bottom then just use the money to fill it up!”

“The Asyeosu temple is built on top of that hole. If we want to rebuild it in the same location then there is no choice but to use this method. We’re just following the advice of the Asyeosu church by purifying the earth and filling it in. So how can Duke Sarkin say that the cost of the

reconstruction is a scam? I have confidence that I'll win if I fight it in court."

"You, you bastard!"

Sarkin shrieked and swung his fist. But his blood pressure became too high from the excitement and he grabbed his neck as he stumbled. Ark helpfully caught him and said.

"Please be careful. I want you to see the temple when it is completed in 1 year."

"Ugh.....t-this bastard.....you dare....."

Sarkin started at Ark with a stricken expression. After a short while, he shook his head and moaned.

"....What do you want?"

In the end, Duke Sarkin recognized his defeat. Then Ark faced the caught Sarkin and made a proposal.

"You who have received the right to reign over the 4 estates at the meeting, please hand me the 4 tokens."

"What, what the? What are you saying now?"

"I'm not going to force you."

Ark whispered and laughed. No matter what condition Ark presented, Sarkin would have no choice but to accept.

Ark knew from Daltin that Sarkin's property was worth approximately 2 million gold. Just one day of reconstruction had already cost 50,000~60,000 gold. If the reconstruction was completed today than 20% of Sarkin's entire fortune would've flown away. If the construction was scheduled to be completed in 1 year then Sarkin would become bankrupt and would have a huge pile of debt. Additionally, if Sarkin obtained the 4 territories then he would have to invest considerable amount of funds to restore them. Under such financial stress and

bankruptcy, it was no wonder that Sarkin had high blood pressure. And Sarkin had no way to stop Ark's construction project. The Asyeosu church was on top of the secret dungeon. Therefore if the temple was reconstructed then the secret dungeon would also be included in it. He was also being advised by a priest so there were no legal problems.

".....I understand. The construction.....stop the construction immediately!"

Sarkin said with cold sweat dripping down his face while coughing up blood. Thus the construction project which spent 50,000~60,000 gold a day was stopped.

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".....Nobody in Schudenberg Kingdom can deny your achievements this time. For the loyalty and devotion you showed, I hereby bestow upon Baron Ark the title of Viscount!"

A middle aged aristocrat dressed in flashy court robes proclaimed. The aristocrat handed him a golden scroll. After Ark received the scroll, there were some heroic sound effects and the information window appeared.

-You have acquired the 'Peerage Bestowment Certificate.'

The 'Peerage Bestowment Certificate' has granted you the title 'Honour Knight' (Viscount).

Your achievements have ensured that you will go down in Schudenberg's history. As a Viscount, you will be able to take on various businesses.

Currently you can gain the position of knight. If you chose to make 'knight' your sub-profession then you can join a knight corps and serve the kingdom. Whether participating in wars or fighting monsters, you can gain up to three times the fame and achievements if you participate with the knight corps. There is also a larger change to get missions that

will give more achievements. However, if the knight corps are wiped out during the mission then you will receive three times the penalty. Your fame and achievement will be removed and you might even be stripped of the title.

\* As a noble title bonus, all stats will increase by 15.

\* Fame has increased by 10,000.

\* When completing a quest given by an NPC with a noble title, your status (Honour Knight: 1000 people) will allow you to receive the support of the guards.

-You have learnt a new Lord's skill.

As a Viscount, you can form a knight corps on your territory that will be under your direct control. The knight corps formed on your territory will receive the same advantages as other knight corps. However, if you have already become a part of a knight corps then you can't form one.

+ Knight Corps Formation (Lord Skill): This skill allows you to hire users or NPCs to form a knight corps.

Unlike a normal party or attack group, the knight corps will receive an extra morale bonus. When fighting in the territory, a 10% tactics bonus will also be applied. When participating in a foreign war, they will receive 2 times the fame and achievements than regular knights. In addition, you can get a 50% discount when using all public facilities (knight housing, stables, barracks etc.) under the kingdom's jurisdiction. However, the knights must be accompanied by the Lord.

<It is possible to form and control a Knight Corps>

'I hadn't intended this with my scheme.'

Ark's mouth seemed like it reached his ears after seeing the information. Ark had become a Viscount thanks to the 4 tokens.



'In order to stop the Asyeosu reconstruction, Sarkin was forced to yield the 4 tokens to me. It was the tokens which symbolized ownership to territories within the Sinius Principality.

Ark had instantly taken the 4 tokens to the King.

"Oh, you truly are the paragon of a Schudenberg noble!"

The King's reaction was huge. Finding the 4 tokens was like adding 4 more territories to his kingdom! What King wouldn't like expanding his territories by 4 more? Thus the King praised Ark and made him a Viscount. Naturally a Viscount would be given more bonuses than a Baron. He gained +15 to all stats and 10,000 fame! There was also the new permanent skill, 'Knight Corps Formation.' When he formed the knight corps, he could use public facilities with a 50% discount. However, the real benefit to Ark was something else.

"Congratulations on becoming a Viscount."

Two middle aged knights approached. They were Daltin and Halben, the head of two of Schudenberg's factions. Ark laughed and nodded his head.

"Thank you."

"Honestly, I thought it was impossible when you first suggested it to me..... Yet you really did it....."

"I heard that Duke Sarkin is sick in bed."

"It is natural. He lost 20% of his fortune and even the territories were taken away from him....."

Therefore Sarkin lost the trust of the nobles in his faction. He tried to crush Ark yet he ended up being the one crushed. Daltin looked at Ark before saying deliberately.

"Wasn't the plan a little intense against someone of Duke Sarkin's age?"

"He is the one who touched me first."

“Scary.”

Ark just smiled and nodded.

“Then you should develop your new territories quickly.”

“Yes, we’re very grateful.”

Ark grinned and nodded. That’s right. This was why Ark snatched the 4 territories from Sarkin. In fact, the 4 territories were useless to Ark. Currently the only place where users could become Lords was in Nagaran. Therefore only noble NPCs could claim ownership with the tokens. So Ark had thought about extorting money from Sarkin as a condition to cancel the contract. But even with the contract broken, Ark had already gained 20% of Sarkin’s fortune. Ark grasped that Sarkin was worth 2 million gold, including real estate and various other assets. When calculating the cash assets, he only had approximately 600,000~700,000 gold. He had already lost 400,000 so he only had 200,000~300,000 remaining. If he tried to obtain gold from Sarkin then there would be a limit.

‘With how much Silvana is damaged, that would be enough to restore it.’

So Ark came up with the method to sell the 4 tokens.

‘Anyway, Sarkin has given up the right to the territories. If I return the tokens then it would have no choice but to go to Daltin and Halben. If I request 10% of the profit from the territories from Daltin and Halben then they can’t refuse.’

Ark instantly went to meet with Daltin and Halben.

If Duke Sarkin’s plan succeeded and he gained those 4 territories then his influence would’ve completely surpassed that of Daltin and Halben. But now Daltin and Halben could obtain those 4 territories and surpass Sarkin. That alone would be a windfall for Daltin and Halben. Especially if they restored the territories in the future and obtained an income from it. Giving 10% of that income to Ark didn’t matter. The continuous income from the 4 territories was better than earning several thousand gold at once. Of course, the territories in the

Sinius Principality were still impoverished but once they recovered then they would be a golden goose. Ark understood this and signed a contract with Daltin and Halben. So Ark's entire plan had worked as expected.

"Should the three of us go and visit Duke Sarkin?"

"We shouldn't. What if we really kill that old man?"

Daltin murmured with a sick expression.

"Ark!"

A sharp cry was suddenly heard across from him. Ark reflexively flinched and stopped. 5~6 bloody people were running up a dark alley in front of the gate. Surprisingly, they were Timosi and some Avenger members.

"Ark, I have something to say!"

Timosi breathed harshly as she looked at Ark.

## **Act 8: Legend Quest**

"What's wrong?"

Ho Myung-hwan asked as he quickly approached him. Hyun-woo who was sitting in a chair and drinking coffee got up.

"I found out new information and I wanted to give it to you."

"Information?"

"Yes....."

Hyun-woo nodded and lowered his voice.

"Before you came here, I actually met with one of the users involved in this event."

"One of the Avenger members assisting the demons? You met them in New World?"

"No, we met in real life."

Ho Myung-hwan's eyes widened at Hyun-woo's words. Global Exos had been trying to secure the Avenger members involved in this incident. Of course, all their investigations focused on Alan and the Red Man but they were also interested in the Avenger members. In Hong Kong it was possible to backtrack the New World connection circuits but that was impossible in Korea where there were millions of circuits. Therefore this was the first time Global Exos got any information on the Avenger members. Ho Myung-hwan looked around restlessly after hearing Hyun-woo's words. And he took Hyun-woo to a meeting room.

"Who was the person that Ark-nim met?"

"The user with the ID Timosi."

"Timosi? Her real name?"

"She didn't tell me her real name. I didn't learn that much about her, but in New World it is clear that she has a close relationship with Alan."

"Alan.....?"

Ho Myung-hwan trembled after hearing the name Alan. Then he considered something and asked in an anxious voice.

"Timosi was the one who contacted Ark-nim first?"

"She visited me in New World and set a place to meet."

"Why did she want to meet Ark-nim?"

"That....."

Hyun-woo recalled what had happened in New World a few hours ago.

“Ark!”

Hyun-woo heard the sharp cry in his ear. Then he saw Timosi and 5 bloodied Avenger members coming from an alley in Selebrid. Hyun-woo reflexively pulled out his sword when he saw them. But before he could do anything, the guards flocked towards the chaotic Timosi and Avenger members. Timosi just pulled out a scroll and continued to shout.

“Ark, I have something to say!” Today at 4 p.m. in Yeouido.....”

Timosi said before warping somewhere with the Avenger members. Timosi and the Avengers who had suddenly appeared then disappeared. Thanks to that, Hyun-woo was completely confused. Why on earth did Timosi suddenly want to meet him in reality?

‘Are they planning to PK me in real life?’

He had those doubts at first. But it was strange that they would deliberately risk discovery. Furthermore, the meeting point was in the middle of Yeouido square.....

If there was an ulterior motive then they wouldn’t want to meet in a place like that. After thinking about it, Hyun-woo ended up going to the arranged meeting place.

“Ark? I can recognize you with one look.”

He heard the voice of a woman after reaching the meeting place. He turned around and saw a high school student.

“I am Timosi.”

He felt annoyed that he had been so anxious about meeting Timosi.

The Timosi in New World and in reality seemed completely different. Her looks were the same but her personality was completely different.

While the Timosi in New World was always noisy, the one he met in reality was surprisingly quiet.

“Why did you want to see me?”

“That is.....a request. Please listen to what I have to say.”

“I don’t know what is going on but why should I accept your request?”

“Decide after listening to me.”

Timosi murmured in a testy tone. And Hyun-woo never imagined the words he was about to hear.

The Red Man and Maseutyu had betrayed and killed Alan. Fortunately, Alan who was on the verge of death sent one of his eyeballs in a desperate move. The information stored in the memory crystal allowed Timosi and the Avenger members to escape. However, Timosi and the Avengers were soon pushed into a corner. They had barely escaped the temple but now they had nowhere to go. Timosi and the Avenger members had slaughtered millions of users and NPCs with the demons. Therefore their chaotic value was astronomical and it was difficult for them to even approach a village or city. Now with the Red Man and Maseutyu’s betrayal, they were also the enemy of the demons.

“It isn’t possible.....”

Timosi and the Avenger members realized the reality of their situation. They had risked standing on the side of the demons because of the compensation. If everything had progressed as planned then New World would become the world of the demons. If it was the demons’ world then it would be easy for the Avenger members to gain territories. Alan had also promised a significant amount of compensation in real life. The Avenger members didn’t doubt that and joined. However, that was all ruined with the Red Man’s betrayal.

“.....We’re finished now!”

“Dammit, there is no place for us to go in New World.”

“But that’s not all. We participated in the plan to conquer New World so we will certainly receive some punishment from the game publishers. The whole of New World was rattled so.....”

The Avengers sighed and murmured with each other. Their biggest worry was the action of Global Exos. If they won the war as planned then Global Exos wouldn’t even dare to touch them. If they conquered New World with the demons then the legal sanctions wouldn’t matter. Now that they were kicked out by the demons, they were just mere users causing problems. Global Exos would have no problems prosecuting them even if the demons conquered New World. They wouldn’t be able to play the game properly. Now they could only choose one way.

“Should we delete the character information before that happens?”

“But the characters we raised for 2 years.....”

‘Ugh, there is no other way.”

The Avengers’ opinions were that they would rather commit suicide.

“No, there’s still a way.”

Timosi broken the silence and continued.

“Originally we were going against the publisher. If the plan succeeded then we were confident that we could handle the game company. Even though we’ve been betrayed, the Red Man and Maseutyu are still continuing with the plan. From the publisher’s perspective, it will be more important to stop the plan then to catch some minor fish like us. And we possess information that the game publisher doesn’t know. It allows us room to negotiate.”

That’s right. Although they looked shabby now, Timosi and the Avengers played a central role in the Demonic War.

In other words, they knew quite a lot of information about the side of the demons. Global Exos would definitely want to know the information. If Timosi used that information, she could guarantee safety (character

isn't deleted and no charges) from Global Exos. It was similar to an immunity deal!

"However, we would have to visit the game company directly."

"If we go then there is no guarantee that they would negotiate with us."

"If we use a powerful candidate as an intermediary....."

Hyun-woo instantly appeared in Timosi's head. Whether he intended it or not, Hyun-woo was one of the core people in this event. Hyun-woo knew better than general users and NPCs how big this incident was. How many times did they fail because of Hyun-woo? Furthermore, Hyun-woo's fame rose like a storm after his victory in the Nagaran battle. Global Exos wouldn't be able to ignore Hyun-woo's opinion. But that wasn't the only reason why Timosi thought of Hyun-woo.

"That Red Man.....!"

Timosi had joined the Avenger guild because of Alan. Yet the Red Man had betrayed Alan. Normally the death of a character wasn't worth getting that angry about. However, this time was different. The Avenger members who were killed while wearing the Token of Darkness had their characters deleted. And Alan was also wearing the Token of Darkness when he died. That's right. In New World, Alan was now 'dead.'

"For Alan, I will never forgive them!"

Timosi had no intention of hiding in fear. Even if her character ended up deleted, she would smash the Red Man who betrayed Alan. And Timosi knew that Hyun-woo was the closest person to that goal among all the users. She would contact Hyun-woo who was in the centre of a storm in order to get the chance to smash the Red Man! That's why she risked danger to enter Selebrid and contact Hyun-woo. The problem was whether Hyun-woo would accept Timosi's offer. But that problem was settled surprisingly easily.

'.....I can't waste a chance like this.'



Hyun-woo was inwardly delighted after hearing Timosi's words. Anyway, Hyun-woo would benefit from conveying that information to Global Exos. Furthermore, if he took the intermediary role between the Avengers and Global Exos then he would obtain a lot of information he wouldn't know. Hyun-woo could use that information to play a more active role in the Demonic War. And he might be able to get his hands on a black code item. The prize for the 1st ranking in achievements was 500 million won! Recovering the black code item was 1 billion won! He could obtain a cash prize of 1.5 billion won. That's right. Hyun-woo could easily forget a trivial grudge for the chance to earn 1.5 billion won. So he immediately visited Global Exos.

".....So that's what happened."

Hyun-woo explained it to Ho Myung-hwan who nodded. His reaction was more lukewarm than expected. Hyun-woo looked at Ho Myung-hwan strangely before continuing.

"I realized it after hearing Timosi's words. The true person behind this event is the Red Man. The Red Man used Alan and the Avengers. It seems like he knows all the secrets in New World....."

"I know."

Ho Myung-hwan interrupted Hyun-woo's words while rubbing his cigarette into an ashtray. And he sighed before speaking.

"I also know what the Red Man wants."

"Huh?"

"To resurrect the Dark Lord. Isn't that right?"

"How do you know that?"

Hyun-woo asked with a dumbfounded look. That's right. Hyun-woo heard from Timosi that the Red Man's goal was to resurrect the Dark Lord. Of course, Alan controlled the demons so he knew this incident was related to the Dark Lord.

However, the situation being related was very different from actually resurrecting the Dark Lord. And the only way to prevent it was to stop the Red Man. But how did Ho Myung-hwan know the Red Man's purpose?

"In fact, I also received the information not long ago. And I've been worrying about whether to consult with Ark-nim."

"Consult with me? What is it?"

"That is..... It is hard to explain."

Ho Myung-hwan sighed again before opening his mouth.

"Then I'll tell you honestly. In fact, the chief of the Planning Department ordered absolute secrecy regarding this matter. However, Ark became aware of the issue after meeting with the Avenger members. No, we have to explain so that Ark-nim will keep it quiet."

Ho Myung-hwan said.

"Actually, our security agents found the residences of Alan and the Red Man not long ago."

"You found their homes?"

"Yes, I can't explain how we found it."

"So where is Alan now?"

"We'll talk about Alan later but for now I'll explain about the Red Man. The perpetrator of the Red Man and the one behind this incident is Park Woo-seong."

"Park Woo-seong?"

Hyun-woo frowned and tilted his head to one side. The name was familiar to him somehow. Ho Myung-hwan added in a heavy voice after seeing Hyun-woo's confused expression.

“He is the one who created the main system of New World.”

“The creator.....that’s right, I heard that name in the TV commercial before New World was officially opened.....!”

Hyun-woo finally remembered where he heard the name Park Woo-seong. Park Woo-seong had been called the best game designer of this century on the TV two years ago! New World wasn’t the only game that Park Woo-seong designed.

Even before New World, Park Woo-seong was known for other online games. Some of Hyun-woo’s questions regarding the Red Man would be solved if Park Woo-seong was behind it. The Red Man knew everything about New World and proceeded with his plan. And it was natural that he would be able to control the demons. It was why the Red Man’s gameplay transcended beyond that of an ordinary user. It was possible if Park Woo-seong the creator of New World was behind the Red Man.

“Then Park Woo-seong is the Red Man?”

“That’s not it.”

“Huh? But you said just now.....”

“.....He is the one who made it. The Red Man is a type of hacking program that Park Woo-seong made.”

“Hacking? The Red Man is a hacking program?”

“That’s the part I can’t explain in detail. Anyway, the important part is that the Red Man is a character that Park Woo-seong created and it is currently active in the game.”

“But why would he.....?”

Hyun-woo asked in an expression that indicated he didn’t understand. That’s right. Why would he do this?

If the Red Man succeeded in resurrecting the Dark Lord then it was possible to shake Global Exos and gain enormous benefits. So Alan and the Avenger members thought they were betrayed so that the Red Man

could monopolize the profit now that it was in the final stages. Timosi also thought like that. Yet the Red Man was the game creator? Then wouldn't the Red Man have major stocks in New World? If New World fell into chaos then he would suffer a loss.

'There must be some other circumstances.....'

Anyway, Park Woo-seong was New World's creator. If he made up his mind to throw New World into confusion then he didn't need trial and error. He knew all the systems of New World. If he connected to the main server then everything would go as he planned. Hyun-woo was thinking that when Ho Myung-hwan muttered in a low voice.

"Originally the Dark Lord didn't exist in New World."

"Huh? What..... Timosi said the Red Man....."

"Yes. The goal of the Red Man is to resurrect the Dark Lord. But the Dark Lord just originally existed as a scenario in New World. The resurrection of the Dark Lord was never supposed to be possible in New World until Park Woo-seong. This means no one can predict what will happen to New World when the Dark Lord is resurrected.

"It can't be predicted?"

"That's correct."

Ho Myung-hwan replied with a heavy look. In fact, Global Exos had browsed through various data that they obtained from the villa. But if the information leaked then it would cause chaos in New World. Therefore Ho Myung-hwan had to be careful about every word.

"Then Ark-nim, please connect the user Timosi to outside."

"Connect? You will accept Timosi's offer?"

"We honestly weren't thinking about taking legal action against them. Even if we had such aims, that isn't possible now. It is important

to track the Red Man's movements so we need information of every Avenger member."

"You want information from the users involved in the Avenger guild?"

Hyun-woo tilted his head to one side. Timosi said most of the Avengers had already died. Thanks to the Token of Darkness, their characters were completely deleted. Now those users were completely removed from this event. So why was information needed from them.

"Are you considering laying charges against them?"

"Didn't I already say we aren't planning to do that?"

"But why do you want their information if you don't want to sue them?"

"That....."

Ho Myung-hwan struggled for a while before replying.

"Actually, a problem occurred while searching for Alan."

"A problem? There's another problem?"

"..... Currently Alan is in an unconscious state."

"Huh? U-unconscious?"

Hyun-woo asked with a dumbfounded look. Ho Myung-hwan rubbed his forehead like he had a headache.

"We've recovered Alan's unit but it is possible that he might have used an illegal program to join this event. The Token of Darkness that deleted their characters is a type of hacking item. The Token of Darkness clashed with the illegal program stored in Alan's unit and caused the current problem. This is our opinion after some investigation. Then there is a possibility that other Avenger members have experienced the same thing."

Therefore Global Exos entered an emergency state. Of course, Global Exos' biggest problem was to stop Park Woo-seong and the Red Man. But if more users fell unconscious like Alan then it would be a huge problem. Although they were unconscious, they could die from the slightest slip and then Global Exos would become responsible. A user dying from the game. The backlash from that would be enough to close down New World.

'What the hell is going on?'

It was a problem Hyun-woo never realized would happen. The Red Man's identity was the game creator Park Woo-seong. Alan who worked with Park Woo-seong was in an unconscious state. Why did he feel like he had suddenly become entangled in a huge conspiracy?

"People's lives are at stake. The Avengers are a secret society so wouldn't they contact each other offline? Currently their characters are deleted so the fastest way is for Timosi to get in contact with them."

"I understand. We decided to meet in New World after speaking with Global Exos so I will connect to the game and let you know the situation."

Hyun-woo answered immediately. This problem concerned other people's lives. But while Hyun-woo was standing up from his seat, he suddenly flinched and stopped. Too much had happened in a short period of time and there was still a question that hadn't been answered.

"Why is Park Woo-seong doing this? Do you know?"

Ho Myung-hwan worried over the question for a while before extending an object that was hanging on a string. It was a nail-sized flash drive. Ho Myung-hwan pressed the flash drive into Ark's hand and spoke in a heavy voice.

"This is a copy of the data obtained from Park Woo-seong's villa. Like I said a while ago, the chief of the Planning Department ordered the information to be locked down tightly. I've been continuously worried so I copied the files. But.....Ark-nim knows about this incident and has

experienced more than any other user. If this information will help you stop the Red Man then it is better than you not knowing.”

It was like an information window floated in front of Ark.

-Hyun-woo has obtained Park Woo-seong’s Data file.

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“I-is that true?”

The Schudenberg King asked in a quivering voice. And the Dark Elf surrounded by 10 guardsmen nodded.

“That’s right.”

The King seemed to deflate like a balloon the moment he heard those words. At the same time, the dozens of nobles packed into the King’s Hall fell into a state of panic.

“Oh my god, our concerns were true after all.....”

“We thought the demons have been driven from the Sinius Principality and now.....”

“What are we going to do now?”

“Everyone please stay quiet!”

A heroic voice was heard from among the nobles. The voice had come from Marquis Daltin. Daltin turned his eyes to the man standing next to the Dark Elf.

“Lord Ark, can we believe the Dark Elf?”

“Timosi is a mole I planted on the side of the Red Man shortly after the Demonic War started. Until her true identity was revealed, she managed to stay next to the Red Man and see all his plans.”

Ark surveyed the nobles gathered inside the King's Hall and replied. This was the best thing Ark could do. Ark's thoughts had been complicated after returning from Global Exos. The Red Man's identity, Alan falling unconscious..... His work inside the game was gradually growing. Ark found it difficult to grasp how he should feel about the situation.

'Let's put it in order step by step.'

Ark whispered to Timosi as soon as he connected to the game. And he told Timosi who was hiding near Selebrid what Ho Myung-hwan told him. Global Exos promised not to legally punish them if Timosi handed over all their information. That information was the Red Man's plan.

*-The Red Man occupied the Sinius Principality because of the preparations required to revive the Dark Lord. After obtaining the heart filled with the magic of the devil, the Red Man's plan is now in the final stages. That's why they withdrew from the Sinius Principality.*

*-Then the preparations for resurrecting the Dark Lord have already ended?*

*-Yes. When the ceremony starts then the Dark Lord will be resurrected after a few days.*

Ark felt his heart drop at the Timosi's words. Originally the Dark Lord didn't exist in New World! If Park Woo-seong tried to resurrect the Dark Lord then he would now exist. Park Woo-seong's plan of resurrection the Dark Lord wasn't a joke anymore. He must have a goal. And whatever his goal was, it wouldn't have a good effect on New World. Park Woo-seong dared to take on Global Exos for that purpose.

'There is no guarantee what will happen to New World once the Dark Lord resurrects!'

It was a tremendous threat to Ark. Lancel village, Silvana and the proceeds from the territories in the Sinius Principality.....all the time Ark had invested over the 2 years in his achievements in New World.

'I have to do whatever it takes to stop him!'



However, Ark couldn't stop the Red Man by himself. The Red Man was leading millions of demons. Furthermore, he was moving into the final stages of his plan so he would concentrate all his power and forces in one place. The only way to stop the Red Man was to gather the strength of all the NPCs and users in New World.

'If the Red Man restores the Dark Lord then it will be too late. I have to quickly collect the users and NPCs to stop the Red Man. But the Avengers are the only ones that know about the Red Man's plan. The users and NPCs are already confused because they thought they won the Demonic War already. Even if I try to raise a fuss, it will be useless.'

That's why Ark called in Timosi. If he listened to Timosi's testimony who was on the side of the demons then the King would have to believe. Ark insisted that Timosi was someone from his intelligence network to account for her chaotic status and to make her claim more convincing. But the method he chose seemed a bit too extreme.

"If all the preparations have been finished.....The Dark Lord will really resurrect?"

Ark had hoped to take measures to prompt the nobles into action. However, the nobles were just caught by their fear and everything was a mess.

"Will making such noise stop the Dark Lord from resurrecting?"

Daltin frowned and yelled at the nobles. Then he turned back to Timosi and said.

"How many days remain until the Red Man resurrects the Dark Lord?"

"I don't know."

"Where is the place that the Red Man will start the resurrection?"

"I don't know."

"Do you know anything?"

"Damn, how am I supposed to know? The Red Man was planning to betray us so of course he wouldn't tell us all of his plans. I thought the resurrection was taking place at the dark temple until a while ago.

Timosi shouted angrily.

"The dark temple?"

"I've already checked that place. But they have already left."

Ark replied to Daltin's question. In fact, this was his biggest problem. After hearing Timosi's information, Ark had instantly contacted Haverstein. In this current situation, finding the location of the Dark Lord's resurrection was the top priority. The temple Timosi escaped from was located in the centre of a mountain range in the Sinus Principality. So he asked the expedition to quickly check the temple while returning from the Sinus Principality. But the search party Haverstein sent determined that the temple was empty. This meant the resurrection ceremony wasn't taking place at the temple. Daltin muttered with a disappointed voice.

"So we don't know the place where the Dark Lord is going to be resurrected?"

"There is a way to find out."

"A way to find out? How?"

".....It will arrive soon."

Ark murmured in a low voice. Then something happened outside the King's Hall and 10 people poured in. They were wearing white hoods and accompanying a woman wearing white armour. They struggled against a barrier of guards and shouted.

"Ark-nim!"

"Your Majesty, tell the guards to stand down!"

"Yes, all guards withdraw!"

The King waved his hand and shouted, causing the guards to salute and withdraw. That's right. This was the method Ark used to figure out the whereabouts of the Red Man. Lariette and the prophet clan. After Ark requested the temple search from Haverstein, he asked Lariette and the prophet clan to find information about the resurrection ritual in the History Crystal. The History Crystal contained all the information about New World so some remnants of the resurrection ritual might still remain from the Dark Century. Since the temple was empty, he had no choice but to rely on the History Crystal.

"Lariette-nim, did you check it?"

"The History Crystal doesn't contain any information about the Dark Lord."

Lariette answered while gasping.

"But we can guess where the resurrection will take place."

"You can guess the location?"

"When we arrived at Shangri-La, the Truth Crystal was violently unstable."

One of the prophet clan members came to the front and explained. The Truth Crystal revealed the will of the Creator. Using this, the prophets could see the past, present and future of New World. But when Lariette and the prophet clan arrived at Shangri-La, something rose in the Truth Crystal.

"It was an island emitting unimaginable amounts of dark energy. It is clearly a revelation that the Dark Lord will appear on this island in the foreseeable future."

"Do you know where that island is?"

"I know. It is an island called Kwarian."

"Kwarian?"

The bishop standing next to the King burst out after hearing the prophet's answer. He staggered like he received an impact and muttered.

"Oh my god, I should've known earlier....."

"What do you mean?"

"Kwarian.....it is an island from the Bible. After gathering the power of the universe together, this holy island was the first place that the Creator stepped foot on in order to create this world..... In the Bible, this island was called the beginning and end of the world. If an existence that wanted to destroy the world was revived.....then the only possible location is Kwarian."

"Your Majesty!"

Daltin knelt down and shouted. The King's Hall that was wrapped in silence suddenly seemed to awaken. Dozens of nobles knelt down simultaneously and repeated.

"Your Majesty!"

It was clear what their behaviour meant. The King looked at the nobles and smacked the arm of the throne with his fist before getting up.

"Listen. Based on the reports just now, it is clear that the continent is on the brink of ruin. This doesn't just apply to the residents of the Schudenberg Kingdom. This is an existence which threatens the whole world. I proclaim as the Schudenberg King. Summon all warriors who have stepped foot on this land! Also request for the total mobilization of warriors from the Bristania Kingdom!"

"As you will!"

The shout echoed like a bomb through the King's Hall. At the same time, there was the beating of drums and the quest renewed.

-The quest has been updated.

### Expedition Army's Crusade= The Dark Lord (Legend Quest)

Despite the efforts of millions of people, the continent is facing its worst crisis. The Dark Lord who will drive this world to ruin is preparing for his resurrection. If the Dark Lord is resurrected then this world can only groan with despair and grief. The living and dead will become reversed and a hellish poison will emerge that will poison the earth.

The Schudenberg King has decreed a mobilization of all the troops on the continent. This is a message of salvation that transcends all the barriers of borders and species. It doesn't matter whether you are brave warriors with hearts of steel or saints who preach the divine will! This is the last crusade to protect the world!

This crusade will become a legend!

<Difficulty: S++ Quest Restriction: Level 300 or more>

<All users over level 300 will be forced to accept this quest>

'That's it!'

Ark's chest pounded after he confirmed the quest. Now the whole continent would move to prevent the Dark Lord's resurrection.

'But the person we need to stop is New World's creator, Park Woo-seong!'

That's right. The Legend Quest was just the beginning. The Red Man would use every method possible to resurrect the Dark Lord. Even if the whole continent was rallied, there was no guarantee that they could stop the creator of New World.

'However, this is a war that can't be avoided!'

It was the will of everybody who lived in New World.

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

The quest proceeded like a rapid stream.

“Find out the exact location of Kwarian!”

“Move the expedition armies that are returning towards the northeast coast!”

“Open all possible channels of communication and request the support of the 3 guilds!”

“Commandeer all merchant ships, passenger ship and war ships, arranging them at the coast!”

“Acquire all necessary munitions from each territory!”

Dozens of communications spread throughout the continent. It was determined that Kwarian was hundreds of kilometres off the northeast coast of the continent. So the king ordered all ships to move towards the east coast. The expeditions that were returning home would head to the northeast coast where they would board the boats to reach Kwarian. Meanwhile, all the regular soldiers and users who reached the requirements were summoned. However, most of the regular soldiers and high level users were already fighting in the expeditions. The amount of troops left didn't really amount to anything. In addition, most of the general users didn't know it was a life or death situation for New World. They just thought another quest was triggered. So they weren't desperate like Ark.

“6,000 troops were gathered in 10 hours..... When joined with Dark Eden, there are only 10,000 soldiers.”

Ark sighed after hearing JusticeMan's report. Another sigh naturally emerged after looking at the thousands of users gathered. Of course, the Schudenberg and Bristania expeditions had already left for Kwarian. 140,000 people had entered the combined armies and when considering the NPCs that died in battle, 100,000 were left. However, the number of demons that occupied the Sinus Principality was many times that. They had retreated so there was sure to be many more demons at

Kwarian since it was the final battle. Furthermore, he wasn't only concerned about the troops.

After the Legend Quest was triggered, Ark had visited the Magic Institute in Selebrid. It was in order to contact the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute and ask for help. After the communication to the Grandmaster was connected.

*-Well, the Magic Institute will have to cooperate if this is the situation. But will soldiers alone be enough?*

Ark couldn't understand the Grandmaster's question. However, he soon realized the meaning after the Grandmaster transmitted a video. The video showed a huge flying stingray in the sky. It was the aerial fortress Rwigenberg!

*-This is a video taken by a hot air balloon that the Magic Institute dispatched to check the situation in the Sinius Principality. The hot air balloon was destroyed soon after it sent the video. It is probably because the demons were up to something.*

The Grandmaster emphasized in a serious voice.

*-As you know, Rwigenberg is just like the stomping ground of the demons. There is no doubt that Rwigenberg will also be there on the day of the Dark Lord's resurrection. And Rwigenberg is the aerial fortress that countless allied forces couldn't defeat during the Dark Century. There is no way we can take measures against the aerial fortress with just soldiers.*

This was the reasoning behind the Grandmaster's question.

*-I'm also aware of that.....*

Ark sighed and replied. In fact, Ark was the first person who knew about the existence of the Rwigenberg in New World (aside from the Red Man). Of course Ark would think about the Rwigenberg. Ark had started preparations as soon as he obtained the information about the Dark Lord's resurrection.

'The question is whether it will make it in time.'

That's right. The countdown to the Dark Lord's resurrection had already begun. Ark felt like he had started preparations too late. But Ark had no other choice. Ark explained what he was thinking and the Grandmaster replied.

*-That's right. You've also thought about the general principles. Then let me help with the preparations. I will immediately dispatch the engineers from the closest branch of the Magic Institute. And.....*

*The Grandmaster smiled subtly before continuing.*

*-I will send you a gift in the near future.*

*-A gift?*

*-You don't need to know now.*

*-Then the Magic Institute will support the troops?*

*-When you receive my gift then the answer will be obvious.*

The Grandmaster said before he broke the communication. Anyway, the Grandmaster seemed to accept that the problem was serious. His answer didn't seem definite but he seemed to be supporting the troops. However, Ark was worried because the Magic Institute didn't contact him after that.

"Even if the Magic Institute sends magicians as support, it will be hard with these numbers."

Ark sighed as he looked at the troops in front of the castle. Only 10,000 people gathered for a battle where the destruction of New World was at stake? Even if the 'thing' Ark prepared was ready in an hour, it wouldn't work with these numbers of troops. If he had more time then he could gather more troops. If he revealed the information through the TV then it would gather more users. However, there was no time to even do that. There was no knowing when the resurrection ceremony would begin.



"If they move then....."

Ark had desperately contacted some potential troops but they hadn't replied yet. Then one of the soldiers jumped and shouted.

"Viscount Ark-nim, tens of thousands of soldiers are looking for you!"

The soldier reported to Ark who hurriedly moved to them. There were a huge amount of soldiers in front of the Selebrid gates. When Ark appeared outside the gates, 11 users walked out from among the soldiers. He knew their faces. Aramis, Saruman, Pejito, etc. They were the leaders of the allied forces who participated with Ark in defending Nagaran. That's right. Ark had requested help from Nagaran's allied forces.

"Y-you came!"

Then the soldiers raised their fists to their chests and shouted.

"The 4,800 members of the Aramis alliance under Lord Aramis of Radon have gathered in honour of Ark, the leader of Nagaran's allied forces!"

"The 5,200 members of the Golden Cross alliance under Lord Saruman of Beiku has gathered in honour of Ark, the leader of Nagaran's allied forces!"

"The 4,900 members of the Union alliance under Lord Pejito of Gurana have gathered in honour of Ark, the leader of Nagaran's allied forces.....!"

"The alliance leader?"

Aramis instantly smiled after seeing Ark's stunned expression.

"To be honest, I have no interest in this crusade but it is the request of Ark-nim who protected Nagaran. So I consulted with the other lords and we decided to form a new alliance to enter the war. Isn't it obvious that Ark-nim would be the leader since you are the reason we entered the war?"

"B-but....."

"Arguing is useless."

"The only person who can lead this alliance is Ark-nim who brought us to fighting during the Nagaran battle."

"If you don't agree to become the alliance leader then we will take back our investment in Silvana."

Ark could only stare as he heard Saruman and Pejito's words. Ark had never received the trust of so many users like this. But their kindness and trust were a huge burden. Now wasn't the time to be flooded with sentiment.

"I understand. And.....thank you."

"We've discussed it."

Suddenly 4 nobles approached Ark. They were the Schudenberg King and Daltin, Halben and Sarkin, the head of the three factions. Ark immediately kneeled after receiving a glance from the King. The King pulled a shining sword from his waist and laid it on Ark's shoulder before proclaiming.

"In the name of the Schudenberg King, I name Viscount Ark the commander of Schudenberg's 2nd expedition army!"

Ark's eyes widened as he heard the King's words.

"Commander of the 2nd expedition? Me?"

"We decided with His Majesty after a consultation. You have numerous achievements in the Demonic War and you are also the one who brought us important information about the Dark Lord's resurrection. You are the only person suitable to become the expedition's commander."

Ark made an embarrassed expression as Daltin patted his shoulder after saying those words. Then Halben also touched Ark's shoulder and said.

“And 60,000 soldiers in the 2nd expedition already recognize you as the leader. Who else would be able to become the commander after that?”

However, Sarkin who Ark scammed (?) just turned his head away and didn't say anything. How could he oppose the decision when the Kin, Daltin and Halben all agreed? Anyway, there might be 70,000 people in the expedition army but 64,000 of them already followed Ark. Ark was already the commander. There was no reason to refuse.

“I understand. I will do everything possible to stop the Dark Lord's resurrection.”

“Waaaaahhhh!”

“Cut down the demons!”

When Ark bowed and nodded, the shouts of 60,000 people rang out through Selebrid. At the same time an information window appeared.

-You have become the commander of Schudenberg's 2nd expedition army.

As the commander, all the troops will be under your command and will obey your strategies. Whenever the expedition army gains some achievement, bonus fame and achievement points will be given to the commander.

However, if the battle ends in a loss then all fame and achievements gained will be destroyed.

“Let's quickly head towards Reuben to depart on the boats.”

“Yes. There is no time to delay. Advance!”

The 70,000 troops began moving at Ark's command. He didn't know when the resurrection ceremony would begin so there was on time to waste on marching. Ark divided the soldiers into units of 300 people and moved them to Reuben using the Letter Movement. Even when

using Letter Movement, transferring 70,000 troops consumed a few hours. After he moved 50,000 troops to Reuben.....

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

Suddenly there was a huge roar and the whole earth shook. The sky turned black and a deep red warning message appeared.

-Somewhere in the darkness of the world, the Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony has begun!

Time remaining until the Dark Lord's resurrection: 72 hours>

"U-unbelievable.....!"

Ark's face turned gloomy after seeing the warning. The expedition army hadn't even all gathered at Reuben yet. Furthermore, Kwarian was 1,000 kilometres from Rueben. It would take several days to get there by boat. It would take even longer if the waves became rough from the resurrection ceremony. However, the remaining time was only 72 hours?

"Is it too late?"

Ark muttered desperately.

"O-over there!"

"Huk! what, what the? That is?"

A soldier who was looking at the sky muttered in a puzzled voice. Ark reflexively lifted his gaze and his eyes brightened.

A large shadow was approaching in the sky. A giant air balloon was approaching. And underneath the air balloon, dozens of ships of staggering proportions shone. Flying in the lead was a huge silver airship.

"The Silver Arrow!"

That's right. It was the Magic Institute's Silver Arrow! The air balloon approached and landed in Reuben. At the same time, the Silver Arrow's deck opened and dozens of soldiers emerged and formed a line. Someone wearing an admiral's hat walked past the soldiers and arrived in front of Ark.

"Y-you....."

Surprisingly, Ark knew the face of the man. He was the bosun from the Silver Arrow when it crashed in the war to defend Jackson, Jabel!

"I am Admiral Jabel from the Magic Institute. We have 30 airships like the Silver Arrow. And 500 hot air balloons. Under the name of the Grandmaster, I will now transfer command to Lord Ark. I am honoured to fight together in this crusade!"

Jabel saluted after handing him a document. Then he added.

"The Grandmaster wants to ask if you like his present."

That's right. This was the gift that the Grandmaster was referring to. The airships that the Magic Institute had invested huge funds and several years to create!

"..... Tell him that he is the best."

"If I live and return then I will tell him."

Jabel laughed pleasantly before turning and shouting.

"I have now transferred command of the airships to Ark-nim. Hurry and allow everyone in the expedition to board. The destination is Kwarian. The place where the Dark Lord is being resurrected!"

"Ohhhhhh!"

The crew of the airships simultaneously cheered.

## Act 9:

Kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang!

The violent roar shook the atmosphere. Thousands of flashes exploded in the sky. A large number of flying objects were revealed by the flashes.

“I guessed but.....”

Ark murmured as he involuntarily swallowed his saliva. Using the airships from the Magic Institute, Ark and the 70,000 expedition members flew across the sea. Since the Dark Lord’s resurrection had begun, the sky and water were unstable like angry beasts. However, the airship used the magic engine to separate the wind and flew steadily through the sky. And after two days had passed.

“There is Kwarian!”

An island appeared in the water. It was the island called Kwarian where the Creator stepped foot on to create this world! When the airships entered the area near Kwarian Island, a warning message instantly appeared in front of the expedition force.

-You have entered the sphere of influence of the ‘Jin Demons!’

The Jin clan are one of the rulers of hell and their presence in middle earth has distorted the area. The distortion of this space thanks to the ‘demonic’ influence has corrupted the environment and turned it into a hell space. If more powerful demons appear then the sphere of influence will become stronger.

<The abilities of all players within the Jin Demons’ sphere of influence will decrease by 20%. On the other hand, all monsters that have been changed by the demonic influence will have their stats increase by 20%>

As expected, Kwarian was enclosed in a dark aura. It was like the whole island was covered in a black veil and the outline couldn’t even be seen properly. And the mountain peaks in the centre of Kwarian soared towards the sky. Red flashes appeared around a long pole stuck there.

And a huge stingray with a castle on its back floated in the air. It was the Dark Lord's aerial fortress, Rwigenberg. Then a magician aboard the Magic Institute's Silver Arrow murmured in a quivering voice.

"A huge amount of magic is concentrated on the large castle on the back of the stingray. There are at least 10 million units of magic energy..... That amount of magic alone can completely blow up the island. Furthermore, the magic energy is still increasing. If it continues like this then it will surpass 100 million units in a few days. That is enough to blow up the whole continent....."

It would be like the continent was repeatedly hit by a nuclear bomb. But that wasn't the urgent problem right now. It was the message window that was blinking continuously in the right corner that tightened his nerves.

-Somewhere in the darkness of the world, the Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony has begun!

<Time remaining until the Dark Lord's resurrection: 18 hours>

That's right. The Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony had already been ongoing for 2 days. Now Ark only had 18 hours left to save New World.

'Fortunately the 1st expedition had arrived first.'

Ark looked down at the waters surrounding Kwarian. When the airships arrived, an intense naval battle was already occurring with the demons. The Bristania expedition and Schudenberg's 1st expedition had moved to the northeast coast of the Sinus Principality and arrived first.

"Launch!"

Kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang!

Huge amounts of artillery from the ships flew across the sea. The sea continuously exploded and thousands of demons were torn apart. However, there were no signs that the demons present in the waters surrounding Kwarian were reduced at all. Meanwhile, demons

called Karadon the size of elephants with sharp horns ignored the bombardment and just headed straight to the ships. When the horns stick in the ship, the enormous vessel was turned upside down.

“Throw a hook and seal their movements!”

“Use magic and harpoons to stop the demons from approaching the ships!”

Magic, arrows and various weapons poured from the ships. The few ships used a joint operation to grab the Karadon and bombarded them. Explosions occurred all over the body and the Karadon became like a tattered rag. But while they were taking care of the Karadon, dozens of lizard like demons swarmed and one ship sank. Hundreds of soldiers fell into the sea and were slaughtered by the demons. The water ran with the blood of the soldiers and demons, making it completely different from the original sea. Despite arriving at Kwarian for almost a day, the military expeditions were being pushed back from Kwarian rather than landing on the island. If this continued that the 1st military expedition would be wiped out in one day! Ark confirmed the situation from the sky and shouted.

“Admiral Jabel, hurry!”

“I understand. All magic engines to their maximum output!”

“The magic engines are working at their maximum output!”

The crew busily ran around the deck after receiving Jabel’s order. At the same time, the airships and hundreds of hot air balloons shot across the darkness. They quickly narrowed the distance and arrived at the screaming battlefield.

“Now, let’s show the demons the power of the Magic Institute’s airships. All airships prepare for battle! Prepare the Spear of Thor on all airships!”

There was a mechanical sound and the doors for the gunports opened simultaneously. And showed gun barrels that looked like a sharp spear. It was a magic gun which shot out condensed magic engine! But



that wasn't what captured all eyes. It was a huge trident shaped barrel that appeared on all 30 ships! It was the weapon the Spear of Thor that the Magic Institute boasted about.

"Launch!"

Flash!

The light shot vertically down towards the sea. It was 30 attacks from the airships and 500 shots from the hot air balloons! The demons hit by the light were ripped to shreds. The sea was instantly covered with blood and flesh. And that was just the beginning.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

After the normal gun fire hit, the Spear of Thor exploded all over the place. It was like a lightning bolt had passed by and scratched the surface of the sea. When the devastating amount of energy hit, the sea turned deep blue and sparks spread. Thousands of tons of water were instantly vaporized and turned into water vapour. The demons in the water boiled and swelled like a balloon before exploding. It was enormous damage!

"T-this is.....?"

"Above! The hot air balloons and airships.....it is the reinforcements from our home kingdom!"

"R-reinforcements! It is reinforcements!"

The soldiers who were in a predicament looked up at the sky and shouted. The morale of the tired spirits rose.

"Okay, this is an opportunity! Exterminate the demons with the help of the air support!"

The soldiers attacked the demons and advanced towards Kwarian. But the demons that died were just the front troops. When the demons

surrounding Kwarian ran towards the ship, the entire sea seemed to move.

“Admiral Jabel, turn towards the expedition force receiving the main brunt of the demons’ attacks!”

“I understand. Turn the fleet 45 degrees to the port side! All 30 airships aim the Spear of Thor downwards!”

Jabel started giving commands after hearing Ark’s words. However, the fleet hadn’t finished their bombardment preparations when a sailor who was scouting around shouted in a desperate voice.

“Admiral-nim, over there! Thousands from the front.....tens of thousands of flying enemies are approaching!”

“What?”

Ark and Jabel turned their eyes towards that direction.

Kaaaaaaa-!

It was the huge Rwigenberg floating in the sky above Kwarian! The Rwigenberg’s stomach split to the left and right. And a large number of demons poured out like an evening shower.

*-Kurwarwarwarwa!*

A huge number of Drakens and gargoyles flew from the Rwigenberg’s stomach. Thousands of Tallons riding the Drakens and gargoyles covered the black sky and headed towards the airships. The voice of the scout trembled.

“The enemy is 500 metres away from the lead troops! 400 meters, 300 meters.....”

“Damn, aim the guns and the Spear of Thor at the flying enemies!”

Ark shouted after hitting the ship’s microphone. If the airships were swarmed by the demons then they would be destroyed. Now they

couldn't afford to support the naval battle. The airships changed the angle of their weapons.

"Launch!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

At the same time, the Spear of Thor shot out lightning bolts. The enormous light shot through the darkness and tore through the Drakens and gargoyles. Thousands of demons were hit by the guns while the Spear of Thor swallowed 100 monsters each. At least 1,000 demons turned to ash and fell into the sea. However, more Drakens and gargoyles just appeared.

"Ugh, they're like cockroaches! Everybody deploy their shields!"

*-Bekun, bekun madohoram!*

*-Kurwarwarwarwa!*

Kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang, kwang!

The shields were deployed and the hull shook from a violent impact. The Drakens tried to bite the shields while the gargoyles flew around and shot their rays. The Tallons jumped down onto the deck and swung their swords.

"Oppa!"

Then he heard Roco's voice from behind him. He turned around and saw several Tallons rushing towards him.

"Dark Blade! Riposte!"

Ark pushed the Tallons back and surveyed the battle situation. The airships instantly became scenes of confusion when the demons swarmed. The demons were attached to the magic engine so the ships couldn't move. Meanwhile the hot air balloons were in a predicament as their shields were being torn by the demons and their allies couldn't fire the guns in case it would hit them.

“Roco, please start singing!”

Roco nodded after seeing Ark’s worried face and started singing.

‘The airships are surrounded so I have no choice but to deal with the demons individually.’

“Admiral Jabel, concentrate the weapons on the demons approaching the front!”

“I understand!”

“JusticeMan ajusshi, rehabilitation hyung-nims, face the demons with individual combat!”

Ark yelled as he ran towards a machine lined up on the deck. When he grabbed the handle and pulled it forcefully, there was a roar and it blew up. It was a flying boat for personal battle that the Magic Institute had developed thanks to Magaro’s research.

“Take this. Dark Strike!”

Buaaaah!

Ark flew the flying boat into the sky and swung his sword. The Drakens biting the defense shield shrieked and fell. Then dozens of gargoyles fired rays at him. Ark immediately turned the handle on the flying boat and used the gun mounted on it. The gargoyles that were flying towards him were repeatedly hit. However, the guns mounted on the flying boat only had 1/2 the power of the ones on the airships. And the flying boat shook from a gargoyle’s sharp claws.

“Ugh!”

While Ark corrected the shaky boat, the other gargoyles had caught up. They opened their mouths and fired the rays again!

“Splitting blade of the wind, Wind Cutter!”

“Heroic Strike!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Dozens of magic and attacks suddenly hit the gargoyles and pushed them away. Hundreds of flying boats had arrived behind Ark. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members were leading the flying boats from the Silver Arrow. It wasn't just them. Thousands of flying boats emerged from the 30 other airships. The soldiers from the expedition were taking the flying boats to deal with the demons.

"Bah, I'll make them pay for Alan! Matanyi Shooter no. 1, Devil Penetrating Arrow!"

Among them was the Dark Elf Timosi. After Global Exos promised not to take any legal actions against them, the other Avenger members stopped playing the game. But Timosi heard that Alan was in an unconscious state and insisted on participating in the war.

"Okay! JusticeMan ajusshi and the rehabilitation hyungs will each take 100 flying boats and form a unit to attack the demons! Each leader should organize their unit with the appropriate amount of professions and attack using the tripod battle formation!"

"Understood. The 1st squadron commander will use the tripod formation in the centre! The other units will unfold the tripod formation around the 1st squadron!"

Thousands of allied users were taking the flying boats. They were the top level users of New World. Of course, fighting using the flying boat wasn't easy. However, Ark had used the last two days wisely. After listening to the description of the flying boat from Jabel, Ark had made the users undergo continuous flight training while they were moving. Now the users could fly the boats for at least 30 continuous hours. There was the sound of magic engines from thousands of airboats as they moved. After 1 minute, they had made a huge triangular centering around Ark. Ark's eyes flashed after the formation was completed and he yelled.

"Now show them the skills of Nagaran's allied forces!"

“Show them the results of our training!”

“Let’s go!”

Buaaaaa! Buaaaaa!

At the same time, thousands of airboats roared and rushed towards the demons. The demons attacking the airships and air balloons started flocking towards the airboats.

*-Kurwarwarwarwa!*

“Split through the darkness, Ray!”

“Burning steel sword, Blazing Blade!”

“Take this, Arrow Storm!”

Thousands of skills and magic tore through the darkness. There were flashes and flames as the demons and soldiers collided in the dark sky. Dozens of airboats spouted black smoke and fell into the water. And the demons also collapsed and dyed the water with their blood.

“Riposte! Each squadron rearrange their formation!”

Ark pushed back the demons coming from all directions and shouted. The squadrons rearranged their formation and once again fired magic and skills into the sky. After a short time, the number of demons around the airships and balloons were noticeably reduced. The airships and air balloons also continuously fired their guns and the Spear of Thor. The number of demons covering the sky was obviously decreased.

“That’s it. Their numbers have decreased to some extent! Admiral Jabel!”

Ark shouted into Curio’s ear on his shoulder.

“Yes, Ark-nim!”

Then Jabel's voice came from the mouth of the bat. Thanks to Curio's Summon Stud skill, they could communicate wirelessly between the bats.

"The momentum of the demons has slowed. Advance towards Rwigenberg!"

"I understand. The entire fleet, advance!"

"Each squadron will escort the airship and air balloons as they advance!"

The ships started to advance towards Rwigenberg at Ark's command. Ark and the flying boat squadrons took care of the demons along the way. They had approached within a few kilometres. Suddenly flames rose from the mountain peaks of Kwarian.

"What?"

Ark frowned and fixed his gaze on the mountain. He couldn't tell from far away but he could guess the approximate shape after getting closer. A huge arm was on top of Kwarian's mountain peak. The giant arm was bizarrely twisted with fingers pointed upwards! The fire was spouting from the end of each finger. Ark's face stiffened the moment he confirmed what it was.

"T-that, perhaps.....a scorch cannon!"

That's right. The bizarre arm was a scorch cannon. Two of these cannons had almost destroyed Jackson in the past! Ark knew their power. However, the scary thing wasn't the destructive power of the scorch cannons. It was.....

Ark instantly lifted his head and grabbed Curio's neck before shouting.

"Jabel, we've been deceived! Make the fleet retreat!"

"Huh? What does that mean.....?"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a huge roaring sound and a black flaming mass 10 metres in diameter shot across the space. Jabel's perplexed voice came from Curio's mouth.

"T-that is a flash bomb!"

Jabel keenly remembered the might of the flash bomb. While he was the bosun of the Silver Arrow, the flash bomb had shot down the Silver Arrow while they were on the outskirts of Jackson. Jabel let out a cry of distress from the memory of that time.

"All fleet ships, evade and retreat at full speed!"

But the black mass was already nearing the airships.

Ku kwa kwa kwa kwa, ku kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The black mass crossed several kilometres. It struck the hot air balloons and flames spouted from the hull. Five hot air balloons and airships received 30% damage. Meanwhile the demons gathered around the ships hit by the flash bombs.

"Drive back the demons and retreat!"

Ark shouted while dealing with the demons. Ark commanded the flight formation and intercepted the flash bombs with magic. However, that could only stop 1~2 bombs using that method. In the end, many hot air balloons were hit by the bombs and went down in flames. Although a few more hot air balloons were shot down, the other ships barely managed to retreat from the range of the scorch cannons.

"Dammit, we can't approach the Rwigenberg like this!"

That's right. This was the horrible point about the scorch cannons. The maximum range of the Spear of Thor was 500~700 metres. However, the maximum range of the scorch cannon was 2 kilometres. In order for the airships to attack the scorch cannons, they had to get within 1 kilometre. With thousands of demons interrupting, the movement speed of the airships was slower than riding a horse. If the airships rushed in



excessively then they would just be shot down by the scorch cannon.  
'However, there's no time to hesitate here!'

Ark grinded his teeth as he looked at the blinking message window.

-Somewhere in the darkness of the world, the Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony has begun!

<Time remaining until the Dark Lord's resurrection: 14 hours>

That's right. There was a time limit attached to the expedition. They had already spent 4 hours here. 4 hours had passed since they arrived and they couldn't even approach the island. He also didn't know what difficulties he would face as they continued so 14 hours wasn't enough. However, the expedition wouldn't be able to approach Kwarian if they didn't deal with the scorch cannons. The marine expeditions were also stuck in the rear. If they approached Kwarian then they would become the prey of the cannons.

'There is only one way left!'

"JusticeMan ajusshi, rehabilitation hyungnims, take charge of 10 formations. Plunge into enemy lines!"

Ark turned and shouted. That's right. The only way left was for the flying boats to get rid of the scorch cannon directly. It had a long range but moved slowly. The airships had slow evasive abilities but a small flying boat could easily avoid the bombs. But Ark wasn't just worried about the scorch cannons.

'The problem is that we'll be attacked by demons.'

Reaching the scorch cannons on Kwarian Island through all the demons wasn't easy. Furthermore, the demons would still be attacking the airships. He had to leave some flying boats to protect the airships and air balloons.

'10 units means 1,000 people.....there is no way they can destroy the scorch cannons!'

“Ark, we’re ready!”

JusticeMan’s voice was heard from behind Ark. The 1,000 flying boats had formed a wedge formation behind Ark.

“All flying boats will lure the demons to the airships!”

The thousands of flying boats lured the demons after receiving Ark’s command. The demons gathered in front of the airships!

“Admiral Jabel, annihilate them using the guns and the Spear of Thor!”

“Yes. Launch!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

A huge flash of light engulfed the demons. 1,000 demons dissolved in moments and the remaining demons shrieked and scattered.

“Now’s the time. The special attack corps will rush towards Kwarian!”

Buaaaaa! Buaaaaa!

The demons have either died or ran away after being hit by that magic shot! The 1,000 flying boats instantly followed the trajectory of that blast. The 1,000 flying boats led by Ark shot forward like an arrow while the scattered demons chased after them. And thousands of demons also rushed from the front. The special attack corps was sandwiched by the demons.

“Don’t pay them any regard and rush at top speed! Demonic Distortion! The target is the monster troops right in front!”

Dozens of cursed japtem rose from his bag. They formed a pentagon and exploding, causing a storm and the position of the special attack corps and the monsters to swap. Once the spatial movement was completely, the demons rushed back and forth with confusion. Meanwhile Ark and the special attack corps increase the distance and rushed towards Kwarian. The scorch cannons instantly fired when the special attack corps narrowed the distance to within a few hundred metres. It was

expected.....no, it was the attack he desired. Ark just stared at the approaching flaming black mass.

"The black bomb has a slow speed. Maintain your course until it is 50 metres away!"

So they continued advancing right under the nose of the flash bomb. Ark's eyes flashed and he shouted.

"Now's the time. Stop the previous formation and move at top speed!"

At the same time, the 1,000 flying boats scattered. Then the thousands of demons chasing them were hit by the bomb and engulfed in flames.

"JusticeMan ajusshi and the rehabilitation hyung-nims, take 100 boats each and attack a separate scorch cannon."

"Understood. 2nd squadron, follow me!"

"The 3rd squadron will attack the scorch cannon in the 3 o'clock direction!"

They scattered and flew towards the scorch cannons. A huge crater hundreds of metres deep occupied the centre of the Kwarian mountains. 10 scorch cannons surrounding the surging lava.

"The 1st squadron will attack the one in the 6 o'clock direction!"

Ark led 100 flying boats and flew towards the scorch cannon in the front. The reason Ark chose that place was because it had the most demons. It was the most dangerous place to go! That was Ark's battle style.

"Attack. Dark Strike!"

"Heroic Strike!"

"Smashing Sword!"

Ark's 1st squadron surrounded the scorch cannon and used various skills. During the Jackson defense war, he had only managed to destroy the scorch cannon using the Magic Bomb. However, at that time Ark and the other users only had an average level of 60. Now Ark was level 460 and the other users in the squadron exceeded level 350. There were only the 100 magic guns on the flying boats. When 100 people surrounded it, the durability of the scorch cannon quickly decreased.

*-Kurwarwarwarwa!*

The cannon's durability had gone down to 50%. Meanwhile the 1,000 chasing demons reached the formation. Ark turned and ordered the flying boat.

"Damn, 50 people will keep on attack the scorch cannons while the other 50 will go with me to fight the demons!"

There was nowhere left to go. The highest ranking soldiers in the Nagaran allied forces were in Ark's 1st squadron. The special attack corps had to quickly destroy the scorch cannon.

"Demonic Manifestations. Shield, shield, shield, shield and shield!"

It was at that moment. Ark screamed and shields soared out from his bag. They exploded and a giant shield insignia formed over the squadron.

-Demonic energy has been extracted from the offerings (Shield, shield, shield, shield and shield).

The effect exercised by this combinations is 'Physical Shield.'

[Physical Shield]: When Physical Shield is exercised, the centre of a 100 metre space will have its defense increased by 500. The defense shield will have a durability of 1,000. The effect of the shield lasts for 10 minutes or until the 1,000 durability is consumed.

However, the defense shield doesn't move. It also isn't possible to make the same effect overlap.

A transparent shield formed around the squadron along with the message. Almost at the same time, the squadron collided with the thousands of demons.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a violent flash and a huge roaring sound. Once the thousands of demons and the soldiers collided, it quickly became a confusing fight. The demons claws and rays flew all over the place. However, the soldiers also blindly fired their skills and took care of the demons. But it was thousands against 50 people. As time passed, more flying boats spouted black smoke and crashed into the lava. And it became even more difficult to fight against the demons as their numbers reduced. In the end, dozens of demons broken through the defense line and rushed towards the group attacking the demons.

‘Damn, we won’t be able to hold on much longer. Are they almost done?’

Ark split an approaching demon in half and turned towards the scorch cannon. However, the scorch cannon still had 30% health left. The scorch cannons being attacked by JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members had 10% durability left.

‘10%..... Then the other 9 scorch cannons can be destroyed in 5 minutes. Once the 9 cannons are destroyed, they can join forces to destroy the remaining one and we can retreat! 5 minutes, we just need to endure for 5 minutes!’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

“It’s dangerous, above you!”

A scream was audible over his head. Ark lifted his head and flinched. A flying boat spouting black smoke was falling towards Ark’s head. His body reacted before he could think. Ark increased the speed and reflexing turned the steering wheel. Therefore he avoided a direct hit but the falling boat grazed the side. The flying boat was deprived of its centre. At that moment, Ark missed the handle and was thrown from the boat.

‘Ah!’

Ark turned cold as he became horrified. And everything slowed down like time had stopped. Squadron members were fighting the demons around him. And the deep black sky was passing by. And.....he was rapidly approaching the lava.

‘Oh my god, this is.....!’

Ark reflexively closed his eyes. And he prepared to fall into the lava.

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun hissed from his waist and jumped into the lava.

‘Radun? Why.....?’

Ark burst out with confusion after seeing Radun’s weird behaviour. Then an information window suddenly flashed in front

-Your summon Radun has digested 100% of the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian.

Radun’s body has changed after being influenced by the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian. When the Alamone grows to a certain extent, it has the ability to master similar skills which belong to other species. When that power is fully absorbed into the body, it can evolve into a new species.

Radun has completely absorbed the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian and evolved.

‘Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian?’

Ark felt refreshed as he saw the information window. That’s right. Radun had eaten the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian a long time ago and was still digesting it. And his digestion level had been at 95%. It had taken three months to reach that amount. Therefore Ark had expected that it would take another 10 days for Radun to digest it

100%. However, there was a secret Ark didn't know about Radun's digestion of the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian. Just like its name, the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian came from a Fire Draconian. Heat was necessary in order to digest the heart. Therefore the digestion increased when Ark went to a hot location and slowed when he moved to a cold place. It especially slowed when it was winter. It had taken three months for the digestion to reach 95% because he hadn't been in any desert or volcanic areas. Radun who was suddenly in a lava area had his digestion rate increased at a tremendous pace. When it had reached 99%, Radun had jumped into the lava and the digestion had reached 100%.

'But.....'

A frustrated sigh emerged from Ark's mouth. In this situation, there was only a few seconds left before he would plunge into the lava. If the remaining military expedition couldn't stop the Dark Lord's resurrection then New World would be destroyed. What was the point of Radun evolving now? Just as Ark was thinking this.

Flash! Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Suddenly there was a flash from the lava where Radun disappeared. And a dragon with glossy, red scales flew up.

'What? There are still demons within the lava.....'

Then the dragon grabbed Ark's collar and flew up into the sky. Suddenly a message window appeared in front of Ark.

-Radun has absorbed the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian and successfully evolved.

After absorbing the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian, Radun has evolved into a new species. The Fire Draconian is a species with the lineage and magic of a dragon. Radun has absorbed the magic and inherited this lineage after growing into an adult.

According to the great power that oversees the Netherworld, Radun will now be named 'Burning Soul.'

### Burning Soul

Radun has obtained the biology of the Fire Draconian after absorbing the Burning Heart of the Fire Draconian. As an Alamone, Burning Soul has gained the ancient characteristics of the Fire Draconian. He can store more items and use more skills freely. In addition, he will learn more skills using his instincts as his experience and knowledge accumulate.

<b>Race</b>	Netherworld Creature	<b>Alignment</b>	Dark
<b>Ranking</b>	Complete Body		
<b>Health</b>	2,000	<b>Loyalty</b>	–
<b>Strength</b>	–	<b>Agility</b>	–
<b>Stamina</b>	–	<b>Wisdom</b>	–
<b>Intelligence</b>	–	<b>Luck</b>	–

\* The equipped skills slot has expanded to 4.

\* Item storage capacity has doubled.

\* Able to transform into 'Pendragon.'

**Pendragon:** Burning Soul can transform into a dragon called Pendragon.

Pendragon is an ancient dragon that can fly in the sky and shoot flames from its mouth. No species can match its flying speed and the sacred flames can increase the attack and defense of its master. In ancient times, warriors riding the Pendragons were regarded as the ultimate warriors in battle. However, Burning Soul will consume 20 mana every 10 seconds when he transforms into Pendragon.

\* Pendragon's health once transformed: + 5,000

\* When mounted on Pendragon, movement speed +1,000%



\* Attack and defense of the player will increase by 20% when mounted on Pendragon

“Pendragon? T-then this dragon is.....?”

Kurarara, kurarara!

Ark looked at Burning Soul with dumbfounded eyes. When he stared into the dragon’s eyes, Radun’s personality shone through!

*-Kurwarwarwarwa!*

When Burning Soul soared up with Ark, the Drakens immediately came running. Then Burning Soul shook his head and placed Ark on his back. He opened his wings and ripped between the Drakens like an arrow. At that moment, a dark aura exploded from Ark’s sword.

“Dark Strike!”

Pepepepeng, pepepepeng!

Ark’s sword tore through the Drakens. Ark’s attack and defense had increased by 20% because he was riding Pendragon! Therefore the damage of Dark Strike increased by 20% and the Drakens fell down.

“Okay. I’ll just this momentum! Surviving squadron members, gather around me!”

Ark shouted as he approached the demons on Burning Soul. Then 20 flying boats followed behind him while shooting their guns.

“Follow the Commander!”

Once again a fierce struggle began against the demons.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

There was a deafening cry and the cannon being attack by JusticeMan's squadron exploded. At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-The focused magic used in the Dark Lord's resurrection ceremony has scattered.

<Time remaining until the Dark Lord's resurrection: 14 hours>

'Eh? The time.....it increased!'

Ark's eyes sparkled as he checked the contents of the information window. There had only been 12 hours left when he checked it a short time ago. But that time had increased to 14 hours after the scorch cannon exploded.

'Then attacking isn't the scorch cannons only role! It is used to steer the flow of magic that is gathering at Rwigenberg! If we destroy all the scorch cannons then it is possible to delay the resurrection ceremony!'

Ark was soon convinced of his guess. Every time a scorch cannon exploded, the remaining time increased. When the last squadron led by Yapsab destroyed the scorch cannon, the time had increased to 24 hours. There had only been 12 hours left and now the time had doubled.

'The magic being concentrated on the Rwigenberg is gathered from two places, the sky and the earth. If the scorch cannons are destroyed then the magic rising from the earth is sealed and only the magic from the sky remains. Is that why the time doubled?'

Ark immediately understood the situation. However, that was the maximum amount of time that could be increased. There was no way to stop the magic falling from the sky.

'Anyway, I destroyed the scorch cannons and gained some time. Now the only thing left is for the airships to join the battle and destroy the Rwigenberg!'

"Arrange the formation and all airships join the battle!"

Ark gathered the surviving 800 people and returned to the airships. He used the strong firepower of the airships to melt the remaining demons and advanced towards Kwarian. The fierce battle continued for 20 minutes. The numerous airships and hot air balloons advanced towards Rwigenberg using the Spear of Thor. Ark rode Burning Soul at the front of the formation and shouted.

“That’s it. All ships, concentrate your firepower on the Rwigenberg!”

“Launch!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa, kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Thousands of lights exploded from the airships and headed towards the Rwigenberg. And the light caused a blinding explosion as soon as it touched.

“That’s it. Even the Rwigenberg would be damaged with this attack.....”

There was no doubt it would suffer tremendous damage! However, perplexing gradually spread on Ark’s face as he kept on watching the Rwigenberg. He couldn’t even see one scratch on the Rwigenberg. Only a transparent capsule covering the Rwigenberg was lightly damaged.

“S-shield?”

Ark’s eyes trembled. Now there was a shield? Furthermore, it was only lightly scratched after receiving 20 shots from the Spear of Thor that had 1,000 concentrated magic energy? Ark felt like it was a nightmare he couldn’t escape from.

*-Kurwarwarwarwa!*

Then a huge number of Drakens and gargoyles once again poured from the Rwigenberg. And a huge amount of monsters also appeared in the sea. It was like the last few hours of fighting against the demons were in vain.

“The black obelisks.....!”

That's right. The black obelisks! Kwarian was the last battlefield chosen by the demons! Obviously countless numbers of obelisks would be driven under the water and on the Rwigenberg. And the strong magic around this place would end up resurrecting the Dark Lord. Therefore the resurrection speed of the black obelisks would be greatly accelerated.

"Unbelievable.....!"

"How many more times do we have to kill these demons?"

"Besides, the Spear of Thor couldn't break the Rwigenberg's shields at all....."

The expedition members muttered and groaned. It really seemed like a scene of despair.

Ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku, ku ku ku ku!

There was an abrupt roar and the castle on Rwigenberg's back vibrated. And the walls twisted and started to form a giant arm. The bizarre twisted arms.....! That's right. It was the scorch cannons Ark had risked his life to destroy. They had suffered tremendous damage just to destroy the 10 scorch cannons. But now dozens of scorch cannons sprang up from the castle! Furthermore, the Rwigenberg was protected by a shield. The resurrected demons and the new scorch cannons!

"Oh my god! T-this is a scam!"

Ark muttered with a groan. Dozens of shots from the scorch cannons headed towards the airships. It was an attack they couldn't avoid!

'It is finished!'

Ark couldn't even think of running away and just stared with dumb surprise. Then there was an intense storm and dozens of flashes shot from behind the airships. The pillars of light penetrated through the demons and the flash bombs.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The flash bombs simultaneously exploded and the space warped.

“This.....!”

Ark hurriedly turned around. Then a huge flying object was reflected in his eyes. It was a huge land mass covered with thick forests and a white tower.....

“Shangri-La!”

That’s right. The land mass flying through the sky was the land of the prophet clan, Shangri-La. But Shangri-La looked different from before. Giant gun turrets covered Shangri-La in several places.

“Hahaha, the main character always shows up at the last moment!”

A person with a swollen body like a balloon stood on a gun turret and shouted through a loudspeaker.

“Wormer!”

An excited cry emerged from Ark’s mouth. That’s right. This was the plan Ark had prepared to deal with the Rwigenberg! Before Ark had convened the military expedition, he had sent Wormer and the raccoons to reconstruct Shangri-La. While thinking about the Rwigenberg, Ark had remembered that Shangri-La’s defense ward had been able to deal with a large number of flying monsters.

‘The defense ward was made using the magic from the 7 heroes and the 100 warriors. If I make Shangri-La a moving fortress then it might be able to deal with the Rwigenberg!’

His one worry was that the reconstruction wouldn’t be completed in time. And Wormer had contacted him and said that the modifications would take a few days. Ark had almost given up but then the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute had dispatched the airships. And Shangri-La wasn’t the only reinforcements that Ark prepared. Thousands of shadows also appeared along with Shangri-

La. And they fired towards the demons. They were the skyrays holding the Eastern Nation members.

“Good job Wormer! Like you said, the main character always shows up at the last moment! Torrential Sword!”

The one brandishing his weapon and shouting in the lead was Shambala. At that time, 100 armoured ships also appeared in the sea.

“If I’m last then am I the main character?”

The hobbit Sid stood on one of the ships flying the flag of the merchant’s guild and laughed. Flames ignited in his eyes as Ark surveyed them.

“New World isn’t over yet. Let’s go, Burning Soul!”

Kurarara, kurarara!

Burning Soul roared and spewed flames as he flew towards the demons. The airships and 1,000 flying boats followed him. The battle to decide the fate of New World was just beginning!

TO BE CONTINUED